



JOSEPH IS ALIVE

*A Scriptural study of the restoration of
Israel in God's covenant promises.*

B. MICHAEL BLAINE

Everyone wants peace, but where do we find it? Peace talks come and go, neighbor fights against neighbor, brother against brother. Is there any sanity in our world of chaos?

Only as we turn to the Holy Scriptures do we find answers to our questions. In them God tells us to love our brothers as ourselves, and it is only as we search in his Word for solutions that we can truly have peace in our lives. This book was written to show us a faithful God who keeps his promises, a covenant keeper who is faithful to his children throughout all ages.

Jews and gentile Christians alike are invited to study God's prophecies and discover how they apply to them. For the Jew, they affirm his faith in God, and appeal to him to return to Torah Judaism and the covenant God made with the fathers. For the gentile Christian, they point out his place in the Plan of Redemption—how God accomplishes his work of salvation, and appeals to him to submit to the authority of Holy Scripture. They also define relationships between God's two families, Judaism and Christianity. A need exists to draw the attention of Jews and Christians, as well as the secular-minded, to this subject. Its prayerful study will result in a correct understanding of God's Plan of Peace for the ages.



Joseph Is Alive

B. Michael Blaine



Near East Institute
and
Archeological Foundation

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DEDICATION

This volume is dedicated to the memory of my son, Robert.

One can imagine the grief that struck Adam when he learned that his son Abel was dead--murdered by his brother, Cain. Because of this senseless deed, Adam lost two sons, both Cain and Abel, and no doubt Adam grieved for the rest of his life.

I can visualize the shock that came across Jacob's face when shown the blood-stained, tattered coat of Joseph. His cry that Joseph was *tarof toraf*, utterly destroyed, not only spoke of the death of Joseph, but also indicated that something important in Jacob's life was destroyed. In the long, dark hours of the night, when grief is private, I, too, have felt the damp of Jacob's tears on my cheek and pillow. One never forgets the loss of a child.

David was a mighty man of God who had a wayward son, Absalom. He gave his father many problems, and in his opposition to David, attempted to kill him. Yet David loved his son, and his request to the commanders of his army was: "be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake" (2 Samuel 18:12). When the news of Absalom's death was brought to David, he cried out in anguish: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you--O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33). A broken heart is never mended. One can only look forward to a time of restoration.

Our heavenly Father also grieved at the death of his Son. Angel choirs hushed their voices, until there was "silence in heaven" because the Father's heart was breaking. It was because God so loved the world that he gave his Son. Calvary was God's solution to our grief.

Penetrating the darkness of the tragedies of life is the light of God's providence. It turns our grief into hopeful expectation.

Until another time in a better place, I wait patiently for that day when all things will be restored and loved ones reunited. Until that day, may God keep you, my son.

B. Michael Blaine. January 1995

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CASTING JOSEPH INTO A PIT

Genesis 37:12-35 (NIV)

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.

But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe--the richly ornamented robe he was wearing--and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.



Casting Joseph Into A Pit

**by
Sam Philipe
Jerusalem**

The artist has captured in gold and silver the essence of a noted biblical narrative. Stone used for the base was quarried from Dothan, the location of this event. The statue, one of a limited edition, is permanently displayed in The Museum of Near East Art and Archeology Glendale California.

PREFACE

We were reading Bible prophecies and I read a passage from the prophet Ezekiel in which he predicted the return of Israel, the northern kingdom. My colleague, a pastor whom I admired and loved, responded: "Surely you don't believe that, do you?" Is it possible that entrenched ideas could blind one to the teachings of Scripture and thus cause one to reject it?

For two thousand years *sinas chinum* unwarranted hatred has characterized relations between Christians and Jews, and, for four thousand years, between Joseph and his brothers. The hostility has been reinforced by innumerable acts of injustice and inhumanity, man's greatest sin. The holocaust is a classic example of the depths of human depravity. This state of affairs is strange when one considers that both groups claim to be "people of God." Both claim to follow the injunctions of Holy Scripture. Both claim to be led by God's Holy Spirit. Frankly, attitudes of hostility are not supported by Holy Scripture, nor can God be blamed for the atrocities we commit against each other. Many do not realize that their prejudicial attitudes are a breeding ground for more heinous acts. A failure to believe the Scriptures destroys the basis for mutual respect and reconciliation between Christians and Jews.

The current state of relationships between Jews and Christians is aptly illustrated by the article "*Jews Who Choose Jesus*" by Alan Edelstein in the August 1994 issue of *Moment*, a magazine edited by Herschel Shanks (also editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*). Unfortunately, even though accurately describing the situation, Edelstein fails to comprehend the error of basic assumptions held by each group. The activities of those who would "convert" Jews to gentile Christianity are repugnant to Jewish people. It is often tantamount to asking them to surrender their identity. Such cannot be supported by Holy Scripture. On the other hand, spiritual superiority is not the privilege of Jews by virtue of having descended from Abraham. The Scriptures teach that Abraham was called to be a blessing to all nations. Furthermore, some of the revered people of Jewish history had gentile wives. Consider Judah, Joseph, and Moses. Ruth, the grandmother of King David, was a Moabitess.

Christians should keep in mind several issues. Moses and the prophets never record that any of God's promises were made to the gentiles. All the promises were made to Israel. Many Christian groups falsely assume a "replacement theology" in which they believe the church has replaced Israel as recipient of the promises of

God. There is no biblical support for this idea. Christians seem to forget that Paul asked this question very plainly: "Has God rejected Israel?" His response was: "God forbid!" (Romans 11:1) This is a very plain, clear statement of affirmation for the existence of Israel.

We must remember that believing gentiles only share in the promises because of their relationship to Israel. God promised Abraham that "all families of the earth would be blessed" through him (Genesis 12:1-3). The question is, "How?"

Both Christians and Jews worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet each regards the other as "strangers," "unbelievers" without the benefit of acceptance by God. Therefore, we observe a desire by individuals of one group to "convert" those of the other group to a particular religious system.

Moses and the prophets offer an alternative point of view to these attitudes of Christians and Jews. They are, equally, God's two chosen families. Of course, for some this poses a problem. Current Jewish attitudes toward Christians are based on rabbinic Judaism, which is different to the *Torah* Judaism taught in the Scriptures. This must also be said of traditional Christianity, which is quite different than Christianity as taught by Jesus and the disciples and is often an amalgam containing pagan ideas, customs, and anti-semitism. To fairly discuss this issue, we cannot rely upon traditional arguments. Both sides must go back to Holy Scripture as the authority in which the will of God is revealed. Moses and the prophets do offer an alternative, and Paul picks up their ideas in his writings, agrees with them, and expands on them.

For a concise and revealing survey of the history of shameful Christian-Jewish animosity, see *Our Hands Are Stained With Blood*.¹ In this book Michael Brown provides a chronicle of religiously motivated atrocities in the tragic story of the church and the Jewish people, and also points out factors contributing to their development. He asks thought-provoking questions in each chapter.

This present work does not survey the history of Jewish-Christian relationships. A purpose here is to present the biblical basis for mutual recognition, acceptance, respect, and reconciliation between Jews and Christians. Many side issues will be introduced by reference but they cannot be discussed extensively without detracting from the main theme.

Now is the time for change. Reconciliation between Christians and Jews must be accomplished. Two thousand six

¹ Brown, Michael L., *Our Hands Are Stained With Blood*. Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, 1993.

hundred years ago, the prophet Jeremiah wrote: "In the last days you will research this, and then you will understand" (Jeremiah 30:24). Understanding precedes reconciliation and is the result of knowledge that comes from studying of the word of God.

Such study has shown that God does have a plan and his providence ultimately will prevail. Reconciliation will be accomplished by following divine will, and not as the result of human effort. In studying this topic in Holy Scripture, several other issues come into focus. Who are the Jews? Who is Israel? Who are the gentile Christian believers? What are God's plans for them? Who receives the promised blessings of God? Will Israel ever be "gathered" or "restored" as predicted by the prophets?

A great blessing comes to Christians from searching for answers to these questions. They come to understand how they fit into God's plans as revealed in Scripture and to see how the promised blessings of God to Abraham are mediated to gentile believers. With this background, it is also easier to understand the teachings of Paul and the issues he addresses in his epistles.

Jewish people benefit from this study because they realize that God has a plan for the preservation of Israel, and in his mercy, it will be accomplished. Not only did God promise to bless Abraham and his seed, but he included "all families of the earth" in that promised blessing. All the promises made to the patriarchs and prophets will be fulfilled for the covenant people.

I sincerely hope that as a result of reading and researching this issue in Holy Scripture, your eyes will be open to the larger and brighter picture of what the Lord is accomplishing through his providence. I also pray that it will help you understand contemporary issues by placing them in a fresh new perspective.

This study is volume one of a two volume work. It deals with the question of the relationship between Jews and gentiles in the Hebrew Holy Scriptures. Two key questions are: "How do gentiles fit into God's plan for salvation?" and, "Will ancient Israel ever be restored as promised by the prophets?" The second volume will deal with "the times of the gentiles" in the writings of the New Testament. It also will include materials from rabbinic literature.

Thoughts expressed in this work may cut across the theological positions or traditional ideas of some people, but they are not meant to attack the work or beliefs of others. The purpose is to open God's word--the Holy Scriptures--to let the glorious light of the knowledge of God shine into our lives, to brighten the pathway of faith, and to lighten our footsteps as we journey to the kingdom of God.

As a personal note of appeal to study the Holy Scriptures I add these observations:

1. Regardless of background, the student will discover God's plan to make us his people, his sons and daughters.

2. The study builds confidence as we see that God has a plan for this world, and also for our individual lives.

3. We understand more fully that each one of us matters to God, and he has done his utmost--all that is necessary--to bring us at last to the new heavens and new earth, his kingdom in the age to come.

4. We can learn to recognize who are our brothers and sisters in God's family, and to treat each other respectfully.

5. We can recognize that God's plans are far greater than our narrow minded perspectives, and that he sees in every person a potential citizen for his kingdom. We can learn to pray for others.

6. We can read and understand God's messages in Scripture when we remove the traditional religious ideas and suppositions which prevent a person from understanding a plain "thus saith the Lord."

7. We can experience God's special blessings to his people as we study his plan: "Believe his prophets, so you will prosper."

8. We can recognize in the prophetic stories of Joseph and Ephraim a foundation for understanding the teachings of Jesus and Paul, and their ministry to both Jew and gentile.

9. We can find a window on events in God's plans for *aharit hayamim*, the end of days.

In studying this material I have used the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Tanakh and the New Testament. I have also used translations in German, French, Dutch, Latin, and Arabic, as well as a variety of English translations:

I am deeply indebted to Rabbi Isidor Zwirn for his insights into Tanakh and Jewish interpretation of Scripture. Without his participation and encouragement, this study would not have been possible. I am grateful to Steve Mathe for his research and discussion of details of the study. His suggestions have been valuable. Friends are a blessing, and my colleague Dr. Roger Lindner has not only read the manuscript but has enthusiastically given time to discussion of details. I am grateful to Chamma Youssef for her many hours of work in typing the manuscript, and for her patience in making numerous changes. The skills and services of Marilyn Thomsen as an author and editor are invaluable. I am indebted to her. Many thanks to Mike Dowell for his assistance with computer technology.

I am deeply grateful for the patience and encouragement of my wife, Joyce, during the long process of writing. She has helped with editing. Any errors are mine. Finally, I am most grateful for unnamed friends who have financially supported the publication of this book.

A host of friends have encouraged me to publish this material which has been presented in seminars, sermons, and Bible studies. I have dared to do this, recognizing that it may contradict some ideas Christians and Jews have long held. May this book stimulate your personal Bible study as you explore the writings of Moses and the prophets for vital information, and may it result in reconciliation between God's two families, the Jews and the Christians.

Shalom! Peace! my brother, my sister. May His will, His way, and His eternal truths be known to His people!

AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----|----------------|
| THE PATRIARCHAL PERIOD | ca. | 2000 BCE. |
| THE EGYPTIAN BONDAGE | ca. | 1800 BCE. |
| THE EXODUS | ca. | 1445 BCE. |
| THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES | ca. | 1405-1050 BCE. |
| THE UNITED MONARCHY | | |
| Saul | | 1050-1011 BCE. |
| Ish-Bosheth | | |
| David | | 1011-971 BCE. |
| Solomon | | 971-931 BCE. |

THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

| <u>JUDAH</u> | | <u>ISRAEL</u> | |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Rehoboam | 931 - 913 BCE. | Jeroboam I | 931 - 910 BCE. |
| Abijam | 913 - 911 BCE. | | |
| Asa | 911 - 869 BCE. | Nadab | 910 - 909 BCE. |
| | | Baasha | 909 - 886 BCE. |
| | | Elah | 886 - 885 BCE. |
| | | Zimri | 885 BCE. |
| | | Tibni | 885 - 880 BCE. |
| Jehoshaphat | 872 - 848 BCE * | Omri | 885 - 874 BCE. |
| | | Ahab | 874 - 853 BCE. |
| Jehoram | 854 - 841 BCE * | Ahaziah | 853 - 852 BCE. |
| Ahaziah | 841 BCE. | Jehoram | 852 - 841 BCE. |
| Athaliah | 841 - 835 BCE. | Jehu | 841 - 814 BCE. |
| Joash | 835 - 796 BCE. | Jehoahaz | 814 - 798 BCE. |
| Amaziah | 796 - 767 BCE. | Jehoash | 798 - 782 BCE. |
| Azariah (Uzziah) | 790 - 739 BCE * | Jeroboam II | 793 - 753 BCE. |
| | | Zechariah | 753 - 752 BCE. |
| | | Shallum | 752 BCE. |
| | | Menahem | 752 - 742 BCE. |
| | | Pekahiah | 742 - 740 BCE. |
| Jotham | 750 - 731 BCE * | Pekah | 752 - 732 BCE † |
| Ahaz | 735 - 715 BCE * | Hoshea | 732 - 722 BCE. |
| Hezekiah | 729 - 686 BCE * | Fall of Samaria | 722 BCE. |

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Manasseh | 696 - 641 BCE * |
| Amon | 641 - 639 BCE. |
| Josiah | 639 - 608 BCE. |
| Jehoahaz | 608 BCE. |
| Jehoiakin | 608 - 598 BCE. |
| Jehoiachin | 598 - 597 BCE. |
| Capture of Jerusalem | 597 BCE. |
| Zedekiah | 597 - 596 BCE. |
| Destruction of Jerusalem | 586 BCE. |
| Jehoiachin released | 562 BCE. |

*** indicates overlapping rule or coregency**

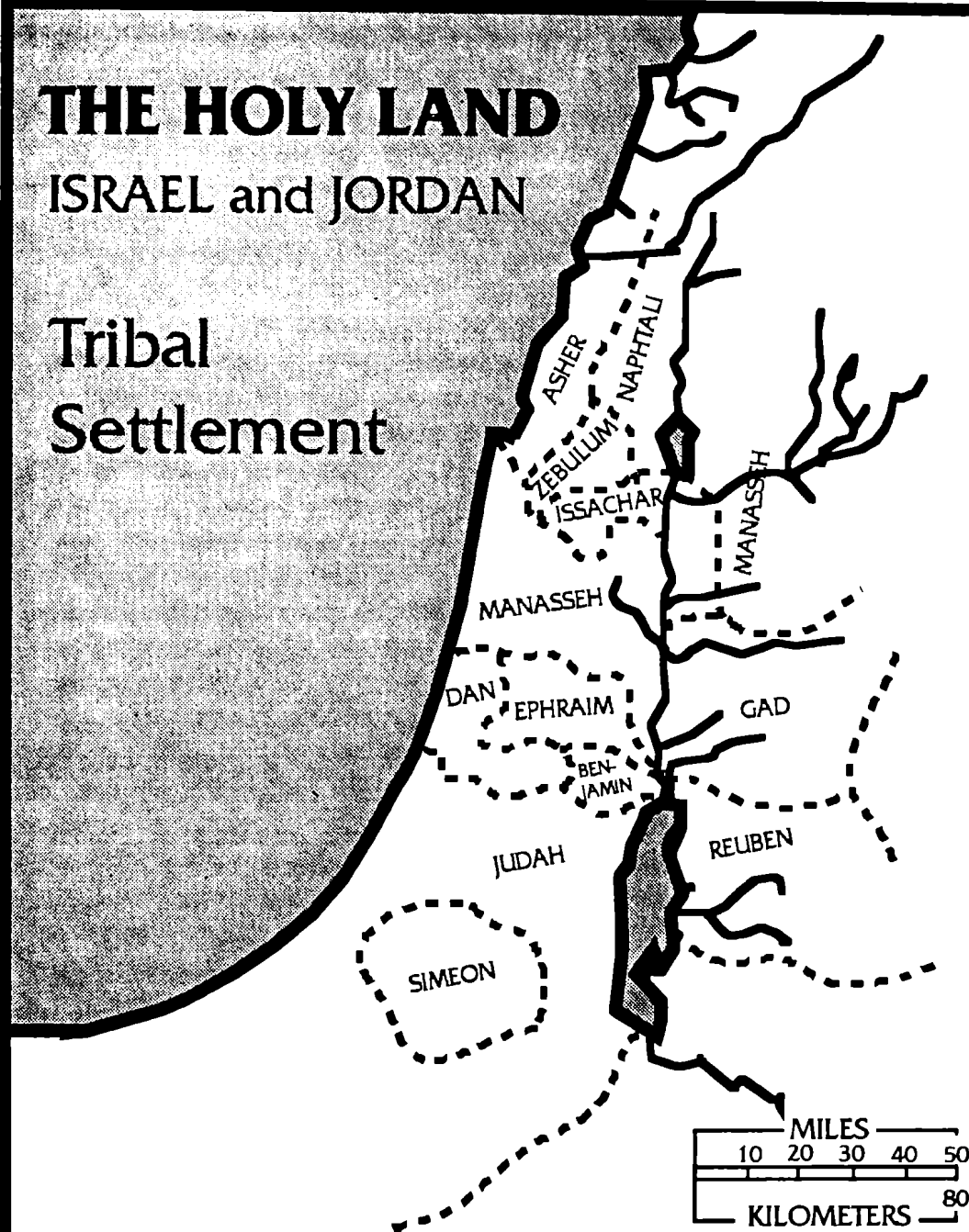
† overlapping date indicates claim to the throne

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| THE EXILE | 586 BCE. |
| THE RETURN FROM EXILE | 457 BCE. |
| HELLENISTIC RULE | 334 BCE. |
| THE SELEUCIDS | 281 BCE. |
| MACCABEAN RULE | 143 BCE. |
| ROMAN RULE | 63 BCE. |
| The First Jewish Revolt | 66 CE. |
| Destruction of Jerusalem | 70 CE. |
| The Second Jewish Revolt | 132 CE. |

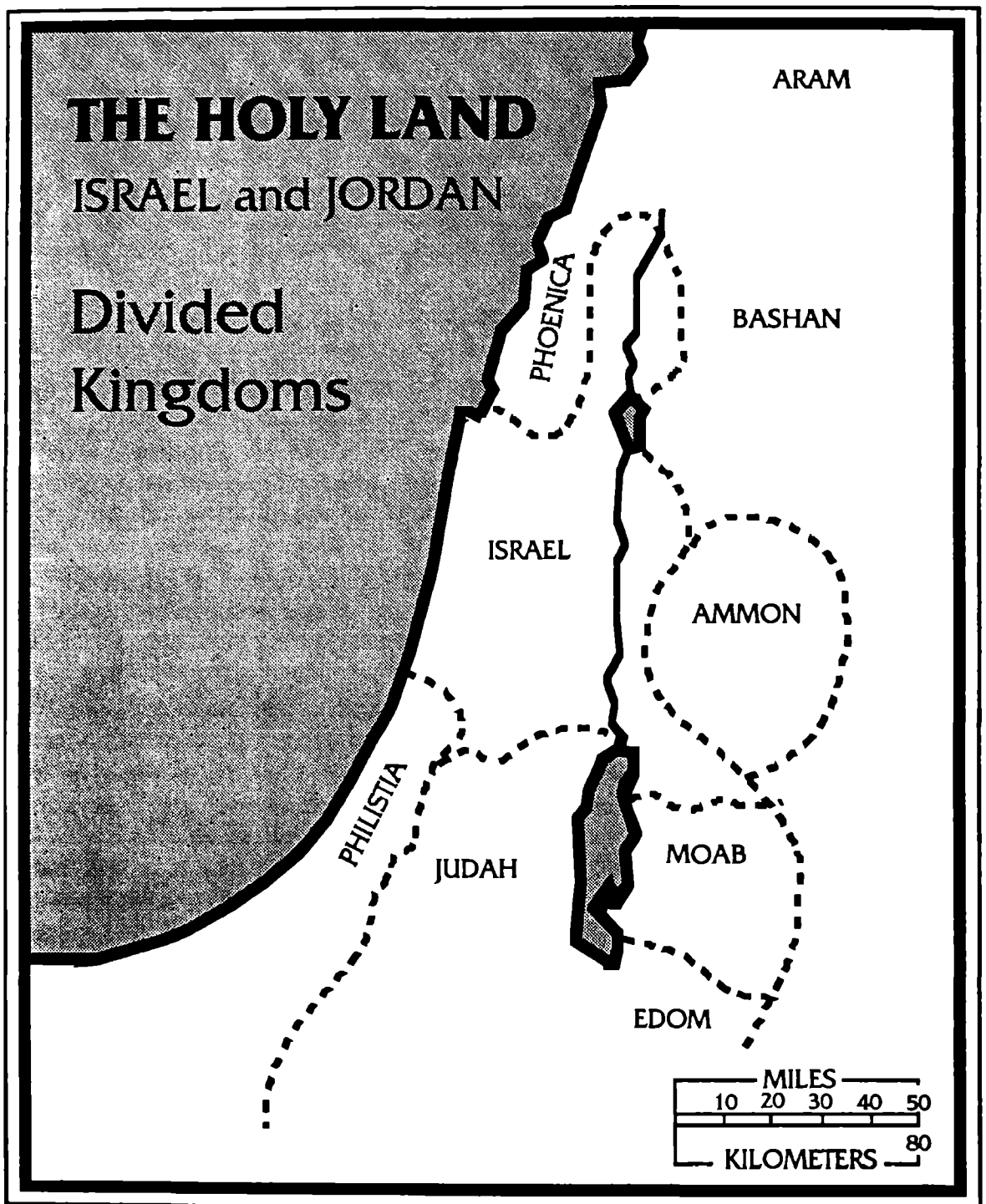
THE HOLY LAND

ISRAEL and JORDAN

Tribal Settlement



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The Roman
Period

SYRIA

TRACHONITIS

BATANAEA

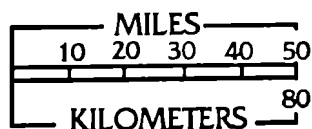
PEREA

ARABIA

SAMARIA

JUDEA

GALILEE

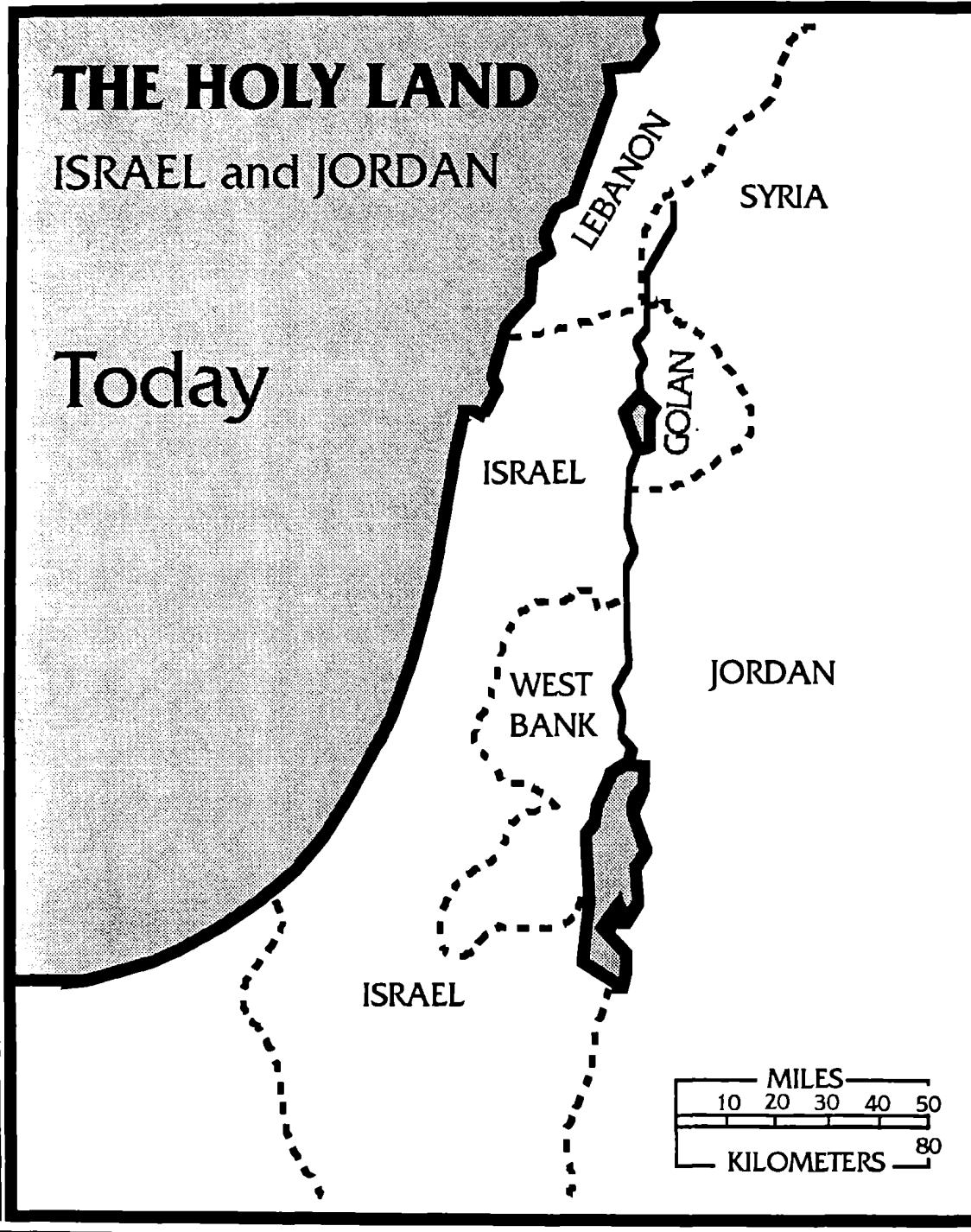


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THE HOLY LAND

ISRAEL and JORDAN

Today



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GLOSSARY

BCE. Jewish dating which means "Before the Common Era" and corresponds to the Christian dating B. C.

CE. Jewish dating which means the "Common Era" and corresponds to the Christian dating A. D. (*Anno Domine*, year of our Lord).

GENTILE. *Goy, (pl.) goyim.* The basic meaning is "nations." It also can refer to a non-Hebrew person. That is to say, one who is not a member of the patriarchal family clan. Abraham was never a Jew. Jews are descendants of Judah, the great-grandson of Abraham. Abraham was a Hebrew. A gentile may also be a non-Jewish person, or a non-Israelite. The word also implies "one who has not entered into the covenant." Then the name "gentile" is used to describe a Jew who has turned his back on his Jewish roots and lifestyle. The term is also used to describe an uncivilized, uncouth or barbaric person. The intended meaning is derived from the context.

ISRAEL. A name with four meanings in Scripture. First, it is the spiritual name of a man, Jacob. Second, it is the name of the confederacy of ten tribes which formed the northern kingdom. Third, it is the name given to all twelve tribes which came from the sons of Jacob and which formed a united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon. Fourth, in the New Testament, it is a name applied to believers in God, Jew or Gentile, as the "family of God."

ISRAELITE. An Israelite is a member of either the northern kingdom or of one of the twelve tribes which made up the nation of Israel.

ISRAELI. A citizen of the modern state of Israel.

JEW A descendant of Judah, or member of the tribe of Judah. In modern times, the names "Jew" and "Israelite" or "Israeli" are used interchangeably. However, in the language of Bible writers, they made a distinction between Jews from the kingdom of Judah and Israelites from the northern kingdom of Israel. Technically we can say that all Jews are Israelites (members of Israel when it means the twelve tribes), but not all Israelites are Jews.

THE NORTHERN KINGDOM. A confederacy of ten tribes which broke away from the united kingdom after the death of Solomon. Five names are used in Holy Scripture for the northern kingdom. These five names are "Jacob," "Israel," "Joseph," "Ephraim," and "Samaria." All five are used by the prophets. Sometimes a prophet uses more than one name.

SHEMA`. The Jewish credal statement of faith. It is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4 which states: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One." The name *Shema`* is the first word of the Hebrew text.

TANAKH. A name composed from the initial letters of the names for the three portions of the Hebrew Holy Scriptures. The first section is *Torah* and refers to the writings of Moses. The second section is prophetic literature called *Nebiim*, meaning "Prophets." The third section is the writings called *Ketubim* (namely three books of Poetry: Psalms, Proverbs and Job; five Festival Scrolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther; one Apocalypse: Daniel; and two books of History: Ezra-Nehemiah and 1/2 Chronicles).

When *T N K*, the initial letters of the titles for the three sections of Holy Scripture, are put together and vocalized, they give us the word *Tanakh*, which is a name describing the entire Hebrew Holy Scriptures.

TORAH. The word has three meanings. It can mean a) the Ten Commandments; b) the writings or books of Moses; or c) the entire Hebrew Holy Scriptures. The name *Torah* is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "direction." The translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Holy Scriptures) used the Greek word *nomos* to translate *Torah*. This then came into English as "Law." *Torah* means direction or guidelines rather than a legal directive.

YAHWEH. A north-west Semitic name for God. The name "Yahweh" comes from the vocalized Hebrew name *YHWH*. This is a name usually associated with God's redemptive activity. Out of respect, Jewish people traditionally do not speak this sacred name, instead they say *haShem*, the Name. In English translations of the Bible the name usually appears as either "Jehovah" or "the LORD."

"JOSEPH IS ALIVE!"

THE PATRIARCHS

In the Holy Scriptures one may discover great themes like strands woven together into a golden cord of revelation and truth. Some of these themes are introduced in the patriarchal narratives about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the period of the beginning of salvation history.

The divine call to Abraham was not an invitation to exclusivity, to separating himself from the people of the world around him. Rather, his call included an injunction to be a blessing to all nations of the earth (Genesis 12:2,3), and thus included the gentiles. God's perfect plan of peace, redemption, and restoration was for all men and women. Abraham and his seed were to be instruments in the hands of *Yahweh* the Lord to accomplish his purpose.

Each of the patriarchal narratives and the later prophetic messages compounded or added to the revelations already given by God's servants. It is our privilege to look back and witness the development of God's perfect plan.

ABRAHAM

Several years ago on a Saturday evening I was in the home of Khalil Ibrahim, mukhtar of the village of Haran in the Balih River Valley located in south-central Turkey. About four thousand years earlier, this had been the home of Abraham. He had lived there until he was seventy-five years of age. The sun had set. In the deepening twilight I walked out onto the fields surrounding the village. I looked up at a spectacular night sky which was lit by a myriad of bright stars. They seemed almost close enough for me to reach up and touch. I stamped my feet and clouds of dust rose into the breezy night air. I laughed. The illustrations used by God in his promises to Abraham came from the patriarch's environment and made perfect sense to him: "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted" (Genesis 13:16); "He (the Lord) took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your seed be.' Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:5, 6). Now I too understood. The Lord's command to Abraham was for him to be a blessing to all nations of the earth and meant that ultimately he would be a blessing to the gentiles. Abraham himself had come from among the nations. Joshua 24:2-4 informs us that Abraham's ancestors had worshiped "other gods" beyond the river (Euphrates).

After the promise of progeny, the patriarchal narratives portray how Abraham attempted through human effort to achieve the promise. Abraham had lived in Haran, a community which archeological excavation has shown to have contained a large contingent of Hurrian people (referred to as 'Hivites' in the Bible, cf. Genesis 34:2) among its residents. The discoveries of Hurrian tablets at Nuzi, Mari, and other archeological sites have provided us with a vast corpus of information on the socio-juridical practices of the Hurrians. Parallels to these customs are found in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis. These discoveries provide insights into unusual features of the patriarchal narratives which could not be explained in any other way.² In his efforts to fulfill the promise of progeny, the patriarch resorted to common socio-juridical practices of his day. Genesis 15:1-4 records the adoption of Eliezer, a steward in the patriarchal household, to become the patriarchal heir. Hurro-

² See Speiser, E. A., *Oriental and Biblical Studies: Collected Writings*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967.

Akkadian family social structures provided for a childless couple to adopt a son to serve them as long as they lived, and then to perform appropriate funerary rites at death. In exchange, the adopted son was designated as heir. Eliezer was probably a gentile man servant (steward) in the patriarchal household, but the Lord informed Abraham that Eliezer would not be the promised heir (Genesis 15:4).

In Genesis 16:2 the childless Sarah asked her husband Abraham to have a child by her slave woman Hagar. Later, this practice was repeated by Rachel, who asked her husband, Jacob, to have a child by her slave woman Bilhah (Genesis 30:3-8). Leah, Rachel's sister, not to be outdone by Rachel, also provided her slave woman Zilpah to Jacob for the purpose of producing progeny (Genesis 30:9-13). In Genesis 30:4,9 these children of the slave women were legitimized as children of the wives and legitimate sons of the family of Jacob. This does not alter the fact that four different women, two of them gentiles, produced the twelve sons of Jacob.

Marriage in ancient Near Eastern societies was for procreation as well as companionship. It is noteworthy that Nuzi marriage contracts specify that the wife who failed to bear children was to allow her husband to take another wife. In one of the tablets it is specified that the wife who did not bear her husband a child, was to provide her husband a handmaid who would bear them.³ Ishmael was the child of Abraham and Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, a gentile Egyptian woman. Again God made clear that Ishmael was not the promised heir, but he would be included in the blessing of Abraham (Genesis 16:10-15; 17:19-21).

In both these narratives, the patriarch attempted to acquire a fulfillment of the divine promise by resorting to the accepted socio-juridical practices of his day. His liaison each time was with a non-patriarchal family clan person (a non-Hebrew, a gentile). However, the divine promise was that Abraham would have a son by his barren wife, Sarah. When it was physically impossible for Sarah to have a child, she bore Abraham a son and named him Isaac, a name taken from the Hebrew word *tzahaq* "laughter." The miracle birth of Isaac was a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and Sarah.

What is the point of these patriarchal stories? First, Abraham felt that it was legitimate and acceptable to be involved with people other than his own family clan (non-Hebrew), even though the promise was for a son through Sarah. Second, we should note that

³ See tablet HSS V 67:19-22. "If Gilimninu bears sons, Shenima shall not take another wife. If Gilimninu does not bear sons, she shall provide another wife for Shenima from the land of Nulli and Gilimninu shall not drive out the child."

the birth of Isaac was a "miracle birth." If one does not accept a miracle birth, then there was no such person as a son of Abraham and Sarah named Isaac, and the child was probably a bedouin child brought into the tent at night to deceive the family. Therefore there could be no such person as a legitimate Israelite or Jew, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Instead, the "seed of Abraham" are all Arabs. The point is that a later "seed of Abraham" would be the promised messiah (Romans 4, Galatians 3:16), and that his birth also would be miraculous (Matthew 1:18). For a person to think of himself as a Jew, or Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, he has to believe in the miraculous birth of Isaac. Therefore, it should not be so difficult to accept a later miracle birth in Bethlehem.

Later, when the Lord repeated his promise to and covenant with Abraham, he said: "You will be the father of many *goyim* nations. . . I have made you a father of many *goyim* nations . . . I will make *goyim* nations of you . . ." (Genesis 17:1-8). Here, at the beginning of salvation history, God included the nations of gentiles. Finally, we should note that the blessing of Abraham was for all his seed and ultimately would include gentile members in his family.

Isaiah 60 begins with the promise of God's blessing on Israel. In John's gospel this is interpreted as a messianic promise of the coming of the Promised One. The light which shone was the revelation of God to ancient Israel through Moses and the prophets. John also suggests that it pointed to the coming of the messiah as the bringer of light. "The light shines in the darkness, but the world has not understood it" (John 1:5). Isaiah goes on to describe the inclusion of the gentiles (Isaiah 60:3). The "forces of the gentiles" are mentioned (Isaiah 60:5) as being attracted to that knowledge of the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and turning to him.

The text then mentions Midian, Ephah, and Sheba (Isaiah 60:6) and Kedar and Nebaioth (Isaiah 60:7). Who are these people? A careful check of Genesis 25:1-4 reveals that Midian was a son and Ephah and Sheba grandchildren of Keturah, the wife of Abraham after the death of Sarah. Kedar and Nebaioth were the first two sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13), the son of Abraham and Hagar. These other "seed of Abraham" were to be included in the promise of blessing, if we believe the prophet (Genesis 16:10; 17:20; 21:17). Add to this the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel, including those who today are identified as Jews (descendants of Judah) scattered as they are among every nation on earth, and impossible to number. Then, too, we should take into account the fact that Paul identified all gentile believers in God (Christians) as also being "seed of Abraham" (Galatians 3:29). When we put together the number of

people included in the promised "seed of Abraham," we can understand God's illustrations of countless stars and dust particles used to suggest the enormity of the promise. It also demonstrates that God's family will be a lot bigger than any of us ever thought. Revelation 7:9 described them as "a great multitude that no man could number," a multitude that included believing gentiles.

We must not forget that God's promise to Abraham also included the promise of land. To Jewish people, this promise has been very precious for thousands of years. Even today, some of the conflicts in Palestine and Israel are based upon ownership of the land. To whom does the land belong? Territorial rights are important factors in all peace negotiations. The basis for this goes back to God's call and promise to Abraham in the second millenium BCE.

This promise of land is not unique to Jewish people. The apostle Paul described Christians as being "heirs" of God's promises. What do Christians inherit? John, in his Apocalypse, wrote of a new heavens and a new earth. The writer to the Hebrews described Abraham as "looking for a better land."

Christianity seems to have focused on the "seed" aspects of the patriarchal promise, while Judaism has focused on the "land" aspects. The promise to Abraham included both, and the fulfillment of the promise was to bring blessing to all families of the earth.

JOSEPH

In Christian circles it is quite common to regard the narratives of early biblical literature as mere stories. They are, however, included in the Bible for more than the entertainment of small children. The story of Joseph, for example, is more than recounting events from his life. Several events in the Joseph narratives as well as statements by participants are demonstrated to have been prophetic with the passage of time. It is the nature of Semitic literature to tell a story to make a point, and we must ask ourselves, "What is the point of the Joseph story?"

Early in his childhood, Joseph dreamed dreams that indicated he had a special future. This story is recorded in Genesis 37 to 50. In Genesis 37:33, an interesting and poignant expression is used to describe "the death of Joseph." When Jacob's sons (Joseph's brothers) reported to him that Joseph had been killed and showed him Joseph's tattered, blood stained coat, Jacob exclaimed *tarof toraf* "Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" This is a Hebrew expression implying that Joseph had been destroyed and that he would never be heard from again. It is more than just saying that "Joseph is dead!" Stress is placed on the finality of the circumstances. Joseph is now totally out of the picture. The use of this expression is to point out the difference between our human perspective and what God's plan has in store--even going beyond human understanding.

As the story unfolds, Joseph entered Egypt as a slave, but after a series of uncommon events was elevated to the position of prime minister. During this time in Egypt Joseph had adopted Egyptian (gentile) ways, dress, speech, and customs. As prime minister, he was allowed to marry into one of the most influential families in Egypt. He married Asenath, daughter of Potiphra (Genesis 41:45), the priest of On (a high priest). It must have been a blessing to Joseph to have his own family, and he named his first-born son *Manasseh*, which meant "causing to forget." No doubt God's blessing had made him forget his difficult days of toil and imprisonment.

Joseph's second son, *Ephraim*, was an added blessing, bringing stature to Joseph's family. This name *Ephraim* comes from a Hebrew root word meaning "to be fruitful." The name ends in the dual form of the Hebrew noun, and implies to be "doubly blessed." God had certainly made Joseph fruitful in Egypt (Genesis 41:50-52), but Ephraim was destined to be fruitful in his own right.

Joseph's two sons probably grew up with all the advantages of wealth and power. They also must have been exposed to the polytheism of Egypt through the influences of Potiphera. But on the other hand, Joseph must have carefully instructed them in the worship of the God of their fathers. He must have told them of God's call and promise to his great-grandfather Abraham, and of their grandfather Jacob's consecration to, and covenant, with *Yahweh* the Lord.

As we pick up the Joseph story in Genesis 42, we find that famine in Palestine drove Jacob's sons to purchase food in Egypt. The brothers appeared before Joseph whom they did not recognize as their younger brother. To all appearances, he looked like an Egyptian, he spoke like an Egyptian, he acted like an Egyptian, he dressed like an Egyptian. As far as they could determine, this man was an Egyptian, a gentile (Genesis 42:7,8). It was Judah, who in describing the family, stated that Joseph "was dead" (Genesis 42:13,22; 44:20). Imagine their amazement, as the drama unfolded and Joseph revealed himself to them (Genesis 45:1,4). Ironically, it was Judah who plead for the life of the youngest brother, Benjamin, and possibly was the one who reported back to their aged father Jacob, *`od Yosef hai* "Joseph is alive!" (Genesis 44:18; 45:26).

This narrative is prophetic of our day in which Jews (descendants of the tribe of Judah) are among those who believe that Joseph (Ephraim, the confederacy of the ten northern tribes) is "lost" or dead. It is common for both Christians and Jews to refer to the northern kingdom of Israel as "the ten lost tribes." But the day is coming, according to the prophets, when Joseph (Ephraim-who will include the *notzrim*) will reveal himself to Judah his brother, and Judah will discover and declare *`od Yosef hai* "Joseph is alive!"

Joseph was told that his aged father Jacob was ill. He went to see him. In a final act, Jacob spoke in prophetic oracle to Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 48, 49). This patriarchal blessing just before death was predictive of "what shall come to pass *aharit hayamim* at the end of the age," or what the outcome of the story would be (Genesis 49:1).

The events which formed the blessing are narrated in three sections. The first, Genesis 48:1-22, records Jacob's blessing for Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim. Jacob began by recounting the promises made to his grandfather, Abraham and his father, Isaac (Genesis 48:3,4). Jacob then proceeded to adopt Manasseh and Ephraim as his sons, to share equally with his other sons in the inheritance. Joseph is described as taking the place of Reuben, the

first-born son, as *becor*, the "designated" or "primary heir" (Genesis 48:5).

Here the birthright was given to Joseph, who was given a "double portion" (Genesis 48:20), because that was the right of the designated heir or first-born son. This double portion was not some form of favoritism. It had to do with the spiritual leadership of the family clan. The extra portion in a Semitic society was for "the care and feeding of the gods." This expression is found in Sumerian and Old Akkadian tablets and points to carrying out the religious obligations necessary for worship of the family gods, which in turn resulted in success, prosperity, good luck, and health for the individual and for the family clan. Here we must note that Joseph (not Judah, or any other brother) became the spiritual leader of the tribes. It was his bestowed birthright. In this way Joseph had a double portion, two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, while each of his brothers had only one.

The bestowal of the birthright on Joseph, a younger son, is a biblical theme that is repeated in other narratives such as the Cain-Abel-Seth story, Esau and Jacob, Reuben and Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, David vs. his brothers, and Solomon. Thus, we can recognize that God has a plan, and he knows the future in which he will accomplish his purpose.

When Jacob blessed Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph, he crossed his hands so that his right hand rested on the head of Ephraim, thus bestowing the blessing, birthright, and spiritual leadership on him (Genesis 48:14, 17-19). Joseph objected to this, but Jacob insisted that the greater blessing was deserved by Ephraim, and that Ephraim would succeed Joseph as the designated heir and spiritual leader of the clan. The blessing on Ephraim included the statement that "his descendants would become a multitude of *goyim* nations/gentiles (Genesis 48:19). The twelve tribes together formed only one nation--Israel. No single tribe ever became a "nation" by itself. Yet, here is a prediction that Ephraim's descendants would include nations, which means more than Israel, and must have included nations/gentiles. This is the first intimation of the fact that Ephraim would be a leader of nations and that the promised blessings of Abraham would be mediated to the *goyim* nations/gentiles through Ephraim.

The second section is Genesis 49, in which Jacob blessed his sons. His blessing not only was given as Jacob, their natural father, but as "Israel," their spiritual father, who predicted a destiny for each of his sons *aharit hayamim* "in the last days" (Genesis 49:1).

The blessing on Joseph is most significant. Joseph is described as a "fruitful vine whose branches reach over the wall" (Genesis 49:22). Here is a reference to the fact that the descendants of Joseph were to include a "multitude of *goyim* nations/gentiles" (Genesis 48:19). Jacob then pointed out that Joseph's descendants would face bitter opposition (Genesis 49:23), but he remains steady because the blessing of the fathers rests upon his head. These blessings included material prosperity, fertility, and spiritual blessings (Genesis 49: 24-26). We might say that Joseph received the "total package."

Again, when Moses blessed the tribes just prior to his death, he repeated Jacob's blessing on Joseph (Deuteronomy 33:13-17). These were blessings of great prosperity for the descendants of Joseph. A detail added by Moses is that Joseph will have an influence which affects all people to the ends of the earth (Deuteronomy 33:17).

The third section follows the death of Jacob. The reason for or purpose of events in the Joseph narratives is given in Genesis 45:5-8 and 50:19,20. Joseph's brothers were fearful that Joseph would use his authority and civil power to avenge the bad treatment they had given him. What they had done to him was inexcusable and unforgivable according to Near Eastern traditions and customs for family relationships. Joseph had every right to avenge himself against his brothers for what they had done to him. But Joseph gave them assurance of safety and security by declaring that all of their misconduct was part of a divine plan. Even though they had intended their actions to be harmful, what they did not realize was that God intended it to take place to preserve Jacob's family in a time of famine. Joseph's words, "God intended it for preservation" (Genesis 45:7), and "God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20), are dramatic. These words are also prophetic of the divine plan for the two families of Israel. God's purpose for events in the experiences of Ephraim throughout history was to preserve Israel, and thus fulfill every promise he had made to Abraham and the patriarchs. This thought is also repeated in Isaiah and the other prophets. Ephraim's (Joseph's) role was to be a *notzrey yisrael* "Preserver of Israel."

JUDAH

The oracle/blessing Jacob pronounced on Judah (Genesis 49:8-11), has been of great interest to Christians, but has not been fully understood. The words of the blessing reflect events from the life story of Judah as recorded in Scripture. It is important for us to consider these events in order to understand the blessing, in which Judah was predicted to be a fighter-warrior-guardian who would protect the family clan.

The blessing begins with a statement that Judah was to be praised by his brethren. This statement predicts that the kingship of the tribes was to come from Judah (Genesis 49:8). Next Judah is described as a "lion's whelp" (Genesis 49:9). In this we see a reference to the cruelty of Judah when he presented Jacob with the bloody, tattered coat of his son Joseph, indicating a violent death (Genesis 37:12-36).

A key word appears in Genesis 49:10. This verse states that "the *shevet* would not depart from Judah until Shiloh come." *Shevet* is a word with two dictionary meanings.⁴ One is "scepter." The other is "tribeship." The translators of the English Bible chose to use only one of the meanings. However, both meanings apply and are prophetic.

Again we turn to events from the life of Judah as recorded in Genesis. For many people, these narratives seem isolated and out of place. Some have difficulty understanding why they are included in the biblical text. The reason these events were recorded was to indicate a background from the life of Judah for events predicted for the future of his tribe. These were predicted by Jacob for *aharit hayamim*, the end of days (Genesis 49:1). To understand the source for this oracle about Judah, we go to Genesis 38. Here, Tamar, as a desperate last resort, tricked Judah (her father-in-law) into fulfilling the Law of the Levirate.

Judah had married Shua, a Canaanite woman. This was not a responsible choice, because Judah should have taken a wife from within the family clan (Genesis 38:1,2) in order to preserve the family property rights. Shua bore him three sons. The first was named Er, a name meaning "waking" or "watchful." The second son was named Onan, a name meaning "to be strong." The root for this word is *awn* from which we also derive another word meaning

⁴ Davidson, Benjamin, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons.

"wickedness" or "iniquity." It is characteristic of biblical narrative, especially when an oracle is given in cryptic language, to use words with double meanings, or words having special significance. This other meaning for the word *awn* is reflected in the statement that the Lord slew Onan because he was "evil in the sight of the Lord" (Genesis 38:10). The third son was named Shelah, a name meaning "the bringer of peace," and is used here to indicate the role of the future messiah.

It is important for us to look at this name and the narrative associated with it. Genesis 38 tells us that Er married Tamar, but died before she could have a child. According to the Law of the Levirate which had to do with inheritance, it was the responsibility of Onan to raise up an heir for his brother. The Scripture informs us that Onan used Tamar for his sexual pleasure and practiced birth control by withdrawal. His reason, as implied in the text, was that he wanted the property of his deceased brother for himself. According to the laws of Moses, Onan stood to inherit the property if Tamar remained childless. God slew Onan for his deceit and wickedness.

Tamar then wanted Shelah, the youngest brother of her deceased husband and the next closest relative who could function as a levirate or kinsman-redeemer, to fulfill the Law of the Levirate and give her a child to inherit from her deceased husband. Judah objected. He probably felt threatened because two of his three sons had died after being involved with Tamar, and he was not going to risk his only remaining son.

As the narrative continues, Judah's wife died. After a period of mourning, Judah decided to take care of the business of selling the wool from his flocks of sheep. Meanwhile, Tamar had realized that Judah was denying her choice of having a levirate child for her deceased husband. So she devised a plan whereby she tricked him into a sexual relationship. Judah, thinking that he was using a "temple prostitute," expected to pay for his pleasures, but could not do so at the time. As a guarantee of payment, Judah left Tamar his seal, his cord and his staff. The Hebrew word used for staff is *matak*, which comes from the root word *nth*. The basic meaning is "to stretch forth" or "extend." However, this word also has other meanings, two of which are significant for our narrative. One is "scepter" and the other is "tribeship." We again encounter these ideas in Jacob's blessing of Judah. In Jacob's oracle/blessing for Judah he used the word *shevet*, which also has the same two meanings: "scepter" and "tribeship." *Shevet* is a synonym for *mtk*.

First consider *shevet* as scepter. Here Jacob declared that "the scepter would not depart from Judah until Shiloh come." The name

Shiloh applies to the messiah. It is a word which means "the one to whom it belongs," or "the rightful one."

The name "Shiloh" also became the place name for the site where Joshua established a cult center and pitched the "tent of meeting" or "tabernacle" after the conquest of the land. *Shiloh* is spelled exactly the same as the name *Shelah* in the Hebrew text of the Judah narratives. In fact, *Shiloh* has four spellings in the Hebrew Bible.⁵ These four spellings are *shlw* (Judges 21:19); *shylw* (Judges 21:21) *shylh* (Genesis 49:10); and the most common spelling *shlh* (1 Samuel 1:9; Joshua 18:1, 8-10, etc.). In the Hebrew text, the same author will use variant spellings for the name Shiloh. Note 1 Samuel 3:21 where two spellings are used in the same sentence.

Some scholars suggest that the name "Shelah" may have come from *sha'l*, a word meaning "to ask." Whatever its root, it seems more plausible that this is a play on words which was intended to express a prophetic oracle about the messiah.

The use of "Shiloh" in Genesis 49:10 is not by accident. It refers back to the third son of Judah who was the "rightful one" to raise up an heir for his deceased brother to carry on the family name and lineage. Judah appears to have had no regard for his family responsibility. He married a Canaanite woman. He gave away his *mtk* staff--the symbol of his family or clan authority. He impregnated his daughter-in-law, when Shelah, his youngest son, was "the rightful one" to perform this duty. He had no regard for what could result from his actions. And yet in spite of all this, Jacob declared that the *shevet* would not depart from Judah until "the rightful One," the "bringer of peace" would come. This is an oracle about the coming messiah who would be a descendant of Judah. Judah's irresponsible actions could not thwart God's plans for him as a progenitor of the messiah. Both these plays on words and the choice of words in Jacob's oracle are significant for our understanding of divine providence in the fulfilling of the promises to Abraham, and the promises of a messiah.

In considering the meaning of *shevet* as kingship, note that the kingship of Judah remained in the family dynasty of David throughout the existence of the kingdom, except for one period when Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, ruled on the throne of Judah.

In spite of the Babylonian captivity which ended the kingdom of Judah, Judah returned from captivity, and eventually Herod ruled

⁵ Young, Robert, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company.

as king. However, the last to bear legitimately the title "King of the Jews" was Jesus of Nazareth.⁶

Jesus was first given this title at his birth when wise men of the East came searching for the one who had been born "king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:1,2). Then at the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate had the title "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37) placed over the cross. You may also recall that when Jesus entered Jerusalem just before his crucifixion, people hailed him as "the Son of David," a title of the messianic king (Matthew 21:4-11). But the role of "king" was not to be his at that point in time, and this no doubt disappointed people who were anxious for the kingdom of God to be ushered in.

It is more than interesting--it is significant that the Jewish prayer book contains the following statement:⁷

שמע ישראל יי אלהינו יי אחד: הוא אלהינו הוא אבינו הוא מלכנו
הוא מושיענו והוא ישמיענו ברחמיו שנית לעיני כל חי
להיות לכם לאלהים:

Translated this is; "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God. The Lord is one. He is our God, He is our Father, He is our King, He is our Redeemer. And in His mercy we will hear from Him twice before the presence of all living beings, and He will be your God." The key word is *sheynit* which in Isaiah 11:11 is translated "twice" or "the second time." This word can only mean "two times" and clearly points to the fact that the messiah comes two times. First he comes as "messianic prophet" (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15 ff.). The second time, he comes as "messianic king" (2 Samuel 7). The words of this prayer are repeated every Monday and Thursday after the 18 benedictions during *Shachrit* before the *Torah* is brought out of the Ark. They are also recited during the *Musaf* service on *Shabat* after the *Torah* is placed back in the Ark.

⁶ Herod was, not a Judean, but an Idumean, and could never be a legitimate "King of the Jews." He created a false genealogy in attempting to legitimize his rule and resolve this problem. The falsehood of the claim also applies to Herod's heirs.

⁷ Silverman, Rabbi Morris, Editor, *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, 139. U. S. A.: The Rabbinical Assembly of America and The United Synagogue of America (Conservative Judaism), 1946, 1973, January 1980.

Such teaching is in keeping with the prophetic picture of Holy Scripture. In Deuteronomy 18:15-22, *Yahweh* the Lord predicted the coming of a messianic prophet "like Moses." Isaiah spoke of him as "the suffering servant" (Isaiah 53). At the end of the age he comes the second time as the "messianic king," the eternal Son of David to sit on the eternal throne (2 Samuel 7). In this application it is true that the scepter does not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes (Ezekiel 37).

There has been no king of the Jews (in Judah) since the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. Nor do we find today a person who can say: "I am a true descendant of the kings of Judah, and a rightful heir to the throne of David." Only the messiah who comes at the end of the age, "in the name of the Lord" (Malachi 3:1), and as King of Kings, has the right to sit on the eternal throne of David (2 Samuel 7:12,13; Ezekiel 37:15-28). To use the words of Paul, which hark back to the name "Shiloh" as a "bringer of peace" (Genesis 38:5; 49:10), he stated regarding Jesus as messiah that "he is our peace, who has made the two (Jewish and gentile believers in God) one, and has broken down the *mahitza* barrier, the dividing wall of *sinas chinum* (unwarranted hatred) hostility (Ephesians 2:14).

Next consider the use of the word *shevet* as tribeship. We must ask the question: "Where are the Old Babylonians? the Hittites? the Philistines? the Assyrians? the Sumerians? the Phoenicians? the Canaanites? or other ancient people mentioned in the Bible? They have disappeared. But ask: "Where are the Jews?" and the answer is "Everywhere!" Jewish people come from Africa and are called "black Jews." They come from the orient and have oriental features, but still are Jews. Jewish people are descendants of the tribe of Judah (that is what Jew means), and they can be found in every nation of the world and in every part of the globe. No Amalek, Hitler, or Arafat will ever be able to destroy the Jews. They will be a people, distinct from the other tribes of Israel and from other nations, and they will be here until Shiloh comes at the end of the age. Jacob's words resound with truth. The *shevet* tribeship will never depart from Judah until Shiloh comes.

This fact was recognized by the apostle Paul who shaped so much of Christian thought in the early Christian church. Acts 15 records the first church council held in Jerusalem. The question had to do with relationships between Jewish and gentile believers. What would be required of gentile believers? At this point in time, the majority of Christians had come from the ranks of Judaism. In fact, the teachings of early Christianity were identical to those of Judaism,

the only difference being that Christians also taught the resurrection, based on their witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Many of the Pharisees at that time also believed in a resurrection. At this Jerusalem council it was decided that a Jewish person would believe in the Jewish way, and that a gentile person would believe in the gentile way. The difference was that certain practices of Judaism, such as circumcision, would not be required of gentiles. This meant that gentiles did not have to take up the rites and rituals of Judaism to be believers. It also meant that Jewish believers continued to practice their Jewish rites. Paul referred to this when he wrote to the believers in Galatia. He spoke of the "gospel of the circumcision" and the "gospel of the uncircumcision" (Galatians 2:7). Paul recognized that the Jew was a person distinct from other nations in God's divine plan, until the end of the age. It is only after the messianic king, the eternal Son of David, would join the "stick of Judah" with the "stick of Joseph". (Ephraim), that "the two become one in the hand of the Lord" (Ezekiel 37:15-28).

The fact that there are two chosen families of God was recognized by the prophets of Israel. Jeremiah 33:23,24 speaks of the "two families which *Yahweh* the Lord chose." Zechariah 10:5-8 places great emphasis on *Yahweh's* (the Lord's) particular blessing for each of these two families. Isaiah 8:14 also mentions the two families of *Yahweh* the Lord--Judah and Ephraim. All the prophets recognized the distinction between Judah and Israel. When studying the Bible it is important that we do the same.

We must be sure to identify God's second family. Israel's (Jacob's) blessing on Joseph was recorded in Genesis 49:22-26. In verse 22 Joseph is "a fruitful vine whose branches reach 'over the wall.'" Could this imply that Joseph would be a tribe which reached beyond the traditional tribes of Israel? (see also Genesis 48:19). Verse 24 specifies that from Joseph will be "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." Most Christians think of the messiah as coming from Judah, but here we have a clear statement that the messiah would also come from Joseph (Ephraim). Finally, the closing blessing states that the blessing of the fathers, which must be a pointed reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, would be on the head of Joseph. Remember that when Abraham was called by God, he was called to be a blessing to the nations. Here we find that the blessing of Abraham was to come to the nations/gentiles through Joseph (Ephraim).

Verse 26 contains an interesting word play. The word *nazir* has two meanings and both can be found in different translations. This word means either "prince" or "separated." Both translations

apply. Joseph was the prince, the one who became the spiritual leader of the tribes. He was also the one who was separated from his brethren. Here also is a reference to the separation which came later under the Assyrian captivity of Israel, the northern kingdom, in 722/721 BCE. This will be discussed later.

Genesis 50 is transitional. The death and burial of Jacob, and then Joseph, are recorded. At this point Ephraim became spiritual leader of the Israelite tribes, the Genesis story closed, the patriarchal period came to an end, and we move into the prophetic period with the story of Moses.

MOSES

The patriarchal period was a time of beginning for Israel, but she did not become a nation until she entered into a covenant with God at Sinai under the leadership of Moses. It is incorrect to speak of Israel as a nation before that event. Under the leadership of Moses mores and customs developed which not only preserved, but re-inforced Israelite identity. Israelites were to be a unique people, distinct from the gentiles surrounding them. Moses is credited with the laws that shaped Israelite life. He recognized the special place Israel held in God's plan for the ages. "Israel is my *becor* first-born" (Exodus 4:22).

When we think of Israelite life, we should remember that the Israelites had just come out of Egypt, where their thinking had been influenced by their environment. Exodus 12:12 states that when the Exodus occurred, Israelites were coming under the influence of Egyptian gods. According to the Egyptian way of thinking, religion was not separated from life, because religion and life were synonymous. The Egyptian language has no word for religion. Life was religion. The Exodus was God's answer to the Egyptian ways of life which the descendants of Jacob were adopting. The leadership of Moses both shaped and affected Israelite social and religious customs. He initiated a theocracy in which their life was to be lived in the presence of and under the influence of the divinity.

The laws of Moses not only dealt with Israelites, but also included their relationships with gentiles. Israelites were to remain separate as a people, but this did not preclude their being equitable and just in their relationships with gentiles. According to the instruction of Moses, a gentile was to have equal standing with an Israelite before the Law (Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:16). A gentile should be accorded equal treatment and opportunity before the Law (Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Numbers 9:14). Even the cities of refuge were to benefit both Israelites and strangers (Numbers 35:15). According to Mosaic law, a gentile who wished it could become an Israelite with full rights of citizenship, and could not be refused.

When we speak or write about Judaism or Christianity, we must carefully define our terms. Each of these religious movements has within it numerous varieties of belief and practice. What Moses established was biblical Judaism which is based upon the teachings of *Torah*. The Judaism that developed after the exile and has flourished to our day is rabbinic Judaism. It is based upon and finds

its expression in *Talmud* and *Mishnah* and the teachings of the rabbis. The Hebrew word for these rabbinic laws is *gezeroth*. In the New Testament, Rabbi Paul made this distinction when he referred to *Torah* versus *gezeroth*, "laws of Moses" versus "laws of the rabbis" (Colossians 2:14). In the Greek text of the New Testament these are referred to as *dogma* (the teachings of men). The identical situation exists in Christianity, which in its biblical form is based on the teachings of Jesus (which incidentally were consistent with and agreed with the teachings of Moses). Christianity, as is commonly known and practiced today, is sometimes based more upon traditions which have incorporated pagan customs, practices, and teachings into its beliefs and expressions, than on the teachings of Jesus.

The influence of Moses on modern Judaism is extensive and cannot be denied. However, it does seem that the instruction of Moses regarding relationships between Israelites (or Jews) and gentiles on occasion has been forgotten. We must admit, after reading the *Torah* of Moses that there was to be a place for the *ger* "stranger" (gentile) in ancient Israel. The gentile was to share in and benefit from Israelite life and worship of God. The idea that the gentile could be "added to" Israel is prominent in Moses, not a new idea introduced by Paul in the New Testament.

In fact, it is this teaching by Moses which is the background to Paul's teachings about relationships between gentiles and Israelites. Note that Paul understood the *mishpat banim*, the law of sonship. His use of terms such as "adoption" (Romans 8:15) and "grafting in" (Romans 11:17-24) imply a full participation by believing gentiles in the life of Israel. Only a person who had the status of a "son" could have rights and privileges and an inheritance in the family of God.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses predicted Israel's failure and cautioned against unfaithfulness to the covenant and *Torah* as root causes of impending failure. Chapter 4 begins by recounting the miraculous deeds of God on behalf of all Israel, and Moses pleads for faithfulness and obedience in observing all the statutes commanded by the Lord. Verse 25 begins a significant prediction which history has shown to describe accurately the history of Israel:

"After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time--if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God and provoking him to anger, I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to

possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the Lord will drive you. There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell. But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in *aharit hayamim* later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath." (Deuteronomy 4:25-31)

Moses placed great emphasis on Israel's relationship to the covenant as the basis for her future destiny. If Israel was faithful to covenant, she would prosper and receive the blessings of the Lord. However, if she broke the covenant, the results would be disastrous. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 enumerates the blessings which would accrue as a result of faithfulness to the covenant. Then in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 the curses which would result from breaking the covenant are enumerated. It is most interesting to read the detail which is given by Moses in his precise predictions. Several phrases are worth noting from this passage of Scripture. "The Lord will bring thee, and thy king whom thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation that thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers; and there thou shalt serve other gods, gods of wood and stone" (verse 36). "The Lord will bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as the vulture swoopeth down; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, that shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young" (Verse 49). "And the Lord shall scatter thee among all peoples, from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, even wood and stone" (verse 64).

Leviticus 26 records the identical information. Verses 1 and 2 are warnings against idolatry and unfaithfulness to the covenant. The blessings which result from faithfulness to the covenant are listed in verses 3 through 13, and followed by a list of the evil results of unfaithfulness to the covenant (verses 14 through 39). Again, we find a mention of the exile. "And you will I scatter among the *goyim* nations/gentiles, and I will draw out the sword after you; and your

land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste" (verse 33). "And ye shall perish among the *goyim* nations/gentiles, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up" (verse 38).

Twice Moses makes an interesting comment in Leviticus 26:41 and 43. It is the idea that Israel must "pay for her sins." This same idea is repeated by the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 42:7,8 the prophet mentions God's judgments on Israel and then states, "by this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be atoned." When the prophet Isaiah describes the restoration of Jerusalem he states "that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins " (Isaiah 40:2). "According to what they have done, so will he repay . . ." (Isaiah 59:18). ". . . I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; . . ." (Isaiah 65:6).

II Kings 17 records the final chapter in the history of Israel as an independent kingdom. It includes the reminder, "yet the Lord forewarned Israel, and Judah, by the hand of every prophet, and of every seer, saying: 'Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the *Torah* Law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by the hand of my servants the prophets'" (verse 13). "The Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only" (verse 18). "And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight " (verse 20).

There can be no question in any person's mind that the prophets of Israel clearly understood that the exile resulted from sin, idolatry, and unfaithfulness to the covenant. To some this may seem a tragic set of circumstances. It is important, though, to study the messages of the prophets to understand that the purpose of God's judgments is redemptive. In spite of her failure, God would restore Israel as a people who would be faithful to the covenant. His covenant with Abraham was an eternal covenant. It is sobering to realize that all of this was predicted in detail by the great prophet Moses. The Lord would use this tragic turn of events to fulfill his covenant with Abraham that all families of the earth would share in the promised blessing.

The final chapters of Deuteronomy contain several warnings and appeals from Moses cautioning against unfaithfulness to the covenant, and idolatry. He spoke of the day when Israel would depart from the Lord, and also mentioned the results of apostasy. He spoke further of a return from apostasy, or a restoration of Israel. These references begin at Deuteronomy chapter 29 and continue through chapter 34.

In Deuteronomy 29:21-27 a curse on the land is mentioned. Deuteronomy 30:1-5 touches on restoration of the people. This is followed by a statement about "circumcision of the heart" (Deuteronomy 30:6), indicating the relevance and value of motives in human behavior. Blessing is promised to those who faithfully observe *Torah*. Next, the Lord appears to Moses and Joshua at the tent of meeting and informs Moses that he is about to die. The Lord then went on to speak of the day when Israel would go into apostasy (Deuteronomy 30:16-18). Of significance is the expression "evil will befall you *aharit hayamim* in the end of days" (Deuteronomy 31:29), and points to the ultimate destiny of Israel. Finally, the epitaph of Moses declared him to be the greatest prophet ever to appear in the history of Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Here we are faced with direct prophetic statements warning against idolatry in Israel and its results. History confirms the fulfillment of these prophetic statements by Moses. If Israel would only be faithful to covenant, God's resultant blessing would be "for all time" (Deuteronomy 4:40). In his appeals Moses included a restatement of the Decalogue as integral to a covenant relationship (Deuteronomy 5). Again, Moses promised blessing as a result of faithfulness (Deuteronomy 6:1-3). What follows is the *Shema*:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). This is given as the basis of an appeal to love God in total commitment.

From Moses, we safely can conclude that the gentile who believed in God was to be included in all the blessings for God's people. On the other hand, the Israelite was not to participate in pagan rites, customs, and idolatry. According to Moses, God's plan was all-inclusive. Whosoever will, let him come!

EPHRAIM

If the role of Ephraim⁸ was predicted in the patriarchal period, it was developed in the prophetic period. It is traditional to associate Moses with *Torah* during the period of Israel's formation as a nation. But Moses was foremost a prophet, and the prophetic gift in Moses became the norm for later manifestations of this divine gift. During his ministry, Moses led the tribes out of Egypt, formed them into a nation of twelve tribes at Sinai, developed and instructed them in religious and cult practices tied to celebration of great historic national events, led them into the covenant, and brought them to the borders of the promised land. This was the beginning of the prophetic period.

It was Joshua, successor to Moses, and an Ephraimite, who led the tribes across the Jordan river and into the promised land. He insisted that all twelve tribes participate in the conquest of the land, and when that was accomplished, he assigned each tribe to occupy its possession according to the instruction of Moses. It was also at this time that a significant action took place. Bethlehem, a village in the hill country of Judah, was given to Ephraim, a northern tribe, for a possession. Why? Because grandmother Rachel had been buried there, and "her tomb is with us even to this day." It is important for gentile Christians to note this fact, because this is a key to understanding the theme of Ephraim and a number of important prophecies and Scriptures. It meant that to own property in Bethlehem, a person had to belong to the tribe of Ephraim as well as Judah.

This information is gleaned from a knowledge of the inheritance laws in ancient Israel. Numbers 26:7 and 9 inform us that the governing principle of inheritance was that property was to remain as a possession of the tribe to which it was assigned. A member of one tribe could not buy or acquire a piece of property which belonged to a member of another tribe.

Now note that at least two towns with the name "Bethlehem" existed in Israel. Joshua 19:15 mentions a Bethlehem in the territory of Zebulun. It was the home and burial place of Ibzan, one of the judges of Israel (Judges 12:8,10). Today it is identified with Beit Lahm, a town located about seven miles west northwest of Nazareth. The other town of Bethlehem is better known. It is located in the hill

⁸ The name "Ephraim" comes from the Hebrew word *pry* which means "fruit." The masculine dual ending on the noun makes it mean "doubly fruitful."

country of Judah, about five miles south of Jerusalem. This town was called "Bethlehem Ephrata."

Here we must recognize a convention followed by scribes who prepared biblical manuscripts. They updated place names from the ancient name to the modern name so that the reader would recognize the place to which the writer referred. This is not a threat to biblical concepts of inspiration. For example, Genesis 14:14 informs us that Abram pursued five kings who took Lot captive. He caught up with them at Dan in the north. But Joshua 19:47 tells us that the city was not called "Dan" until after the Danites had conquered it many years later. In Abram's day it was known as Laish.

Genesis 35:19 states that Rachel died and was buried "on the way to Ephrath," and identifies it as "the same is Bethlehem." But Bethlehem was not known as Ephrath until after the land was divided among the tribes and occupied by them.

Look at Genesis 21:14. Hagar is said to have "strayed in the wilderness of Beersheba." But Genesis 21:31 informs us that it was not called Beersheba until after Abraham had made a covenant with Abimelech.

Why should Rachel's tomb be important? Note that history records only three pieces of property being acquired by the patriarchal families over a span of three generations. God had repeated His promise of "land" to these patriarchs. Each of the locations is sacred to Jewish people today. The first piece of property was acquired by Abraham from Ephron the Hittite and used as a burial place for Sarah (Genesis 23:1-20). Later Abraham (Genesis 25:8,9), Isaac his son, and Isaac's wife Rebecca (Genesis 35:27-29), were buried in the cave of Macpelah. The second piece of property was acquired by Jacob from Hamor at Shechem. This became the burial place for the bones of Joseph which had been brought back from Egypt at the time of the Exodus and conquest (Joshua 24:32). The third piece of property was also purchased by Jacob as a burial place for Rachel at Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19,20). Even though each of these properties was purchased by a patriarch, it was not the fulfillment of the promise, because it was never the Lord's plan that Israel was to "purchase" the land. The promise was that God would give the land to Abraham and his seed as an inheritance. Even today the locations of these three burial places are known and visited by devout Jews who go there to pray. They became tokens of the promises of God which later were fulfilled in Joshua's day (Joshua 21:45; 23:14).

Israelites and Jews have always remembered the burial place of Rachel as a sacred place. This Bethlehem, in the heart of Judah, is called Ephrat, a direct reference to Ephraim, Rachel's grandson, who had received the birthright as the spiritual leader of the clans, and who must have been given the town of Bethlehem as a possession, even though it was located in the territory of Judah. The book of Ruth informs us that Ephraimites/Ephrathites had a possession in Bethlehem. This would not have been possible if Bethlehem was not an inheritance of their tribe. An Ephrathite/Ephraimite could not purchase or acquire a piece of property which belonged to another tribe. His property had to be his tribal inheritance.

The idea of one tribe having a possession within the territory of another tribe is not unique to Ephraim in Bethlehem. Note that Joshua 16:9 and 17:9 state that Ephraim had cities within the territory of Manasseh, and Joshua 19:1 states that Simeon had his possessions within the territory of Judah.

Finally, we should also note an argument from silence. When the southern hill country was given to Judah, all the towns in the hill country and the Shephelah were listed (Joshua 15:1-61). In these lists Bethlehem is omitted. Why? We know that it existed as early as the days of Jacob, and has always been there to this very day. The answer has to lie in the fact that already it was recognized as a special possession of Ephraim. Furthermore, when Joshua listed the towns associated with each region, he failed to list the towns which were in the possession or territory of Ephraim. Thus, it is not surprising to find that Bethlehem is omitted. So are all the other towns of Ephraim.

Later historic events as well as prophetic statements indicate the importance of Bethlehem and its role in the revelations God was to give through his servants the prophets. Micah 5:2 further informs us that the messianic king of all Israel was to come out of Bethlehem Ephrata.

Recognition of these facts is a foundation for us to examine and understand the story of Ruth.

RUTH

Keeping in mind the fact that Bethlehem was a possession of Ephraim, let us look at the biblical narrative of Ruth to note how its ownership is of vital importance for understanding the point of this wonderful story.

Ruth 1:2 introduces the family of Elimelech and Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and identifies them as "Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah." The name Ephraim is a dual form of a Hebrew noun. It takes some irregular forms as it is used in different ways. The name "Ephrathite" means "from the tribe of Ephraim."⁹

The narrative continues as this family transfers to Moab to escape a drought in Judah. The sons marry Orpah and Ruth, Moabite women. The men of the family die and the three widows are left to fend for themselves. Naomi decides to return to her hometown, Bethlehem in Judah, and admonishes her daughters-in-law to return to their families. Orpah accepts Naomi's advice, but Ruth decides to remain with Naomi. Ruth's words are among the most beautiful in Scripture to describe human relationships. "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16, 17).

Who were Naomi's people? Ephraim! Who was Naomi's God? *Yahweh* the Lord! Here we see clearly that the gentile Ruth was added to the tribe of Ephraim, and became a worshiper of *Yahweh* the Lord, the redeeming God of Israel. As the story continues Boaz is introduced. Finally Boaz and Ruth are married, and Ruth gives birth to a child (Ruth 4:13). Ruth 4:17 records an interesting statement: "Naomi has a son." The child was named Obed, and he became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David.

Who was Boaz? In Ruth 4:18-22 we are informed that Boaz was a descendent of Perez. In Genesis 38 we learn that Perez was the child of Judah and Tamar. Therefore, Boaz was a direct descendent

⁹ The Hebrew name *Ephrati* ends with the *iy* gentilic which usually is translated "ite" as in Hittite. The Hebrew *Ephrati* is correctly translated both as "Ephraimite" (Judges 12:5; 1 Samuel 1:1; 1 Kings 11:26) and as "Ephrathite" (Ruth 1:2) in English Bibles.

of Judah. He was also a relative of the Ephrathites Elimelech and Naomi, and thus belonged to both tribes.

A key to understanding the third and fourth chapters of the book of Ruth is to understand the "Law of the Levirate," a custom that is still practiced by some orthodox Jews to this day. Whenever a woman's husband died leaving her without a child or "heir," the next closest relative of the deceased husband was to function as a levirate. That meant he was to impregnate the widow, and the child of the levirate became the legitimate heir of the deceased husband. Obviously, this custom had to do with laws of inheritance and with keeping property in the family.

The background to understanding the Law of the Levirate as dealing with inheritance is provided in Numbers 27 in the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. Their father had died without a son to inherit from him. When Moses divided the land giving each tribe and family its inheritance, these fatherless girls appealed to Moses for their inheritance of their father. Moses granted their request as legitimate and right. He also issued several decrees which had to do with transfer of title to property belonging to an individual who had no sons or daughters to inherit from him. The final step in the law was simply stated that "if his father have no brethren, then you shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman, that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the Lord commanded Moses" (Numbers 27:11).

The underlying principle was that property remained in the possession of the family clan. The custom of the levirate is referred to both in Genesis 38 and Ruth 3 and 4. Looking at features of this custom helps us to understand the story of Ruth and not evaluate or interpret it according to our western ethical traditions. There are many clues in the Ruth narrative which help us understand that it is the Law of the Levirate which is functioning here. To understand the implications of this is also to comprehend the tremendous truths revealed in this important book.

Again, in true Semitic style, a story is told, and we must ask ourselves: "What is the point of the story?" Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth, points out to Ruth that Boaz is a close relative (Ruth 2:2). Naomi also instructs Ruth as to her behavior. Note that under the Law of the Levirate it is the choice of the barren widow to approach the closest male relative of the deceased husband, and he would have an obligation to function as a levirate (Ruth 3:3-9). This was also true in the narrative of Tamar, in which she tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into impregnating her, and thus fulfilling the

Law of the Levirate (Genesis 38: 6-30). Hence the words of Judah, "She is more righteous than I" (Genesis 38: 26).

The story of Ruth is not one of seduction but of inheritance. Notice the words of Ruth. "Spread your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer" (Ruth 2:9). Ruth had made herself attractive and then, after quietly slipping into Boaz's bed, had pointed out to him that as the next closest relative, he had an obligation to raise up an heir for her deceased husband (to function as levirate). To do this was Ruth's choice.

Boaz's response is most positive, and no doubt his loins stirred within him. But he remembered that there was a closer relative of whom Ruth obviously was not aware. Chapter 4 tells us that Boaz then went to the city gate, the place where all legal transactions were witnessed. He invited this closer relative to meet him there in the presence of the judges, and as the meeting progressed, Boaz informed him that the property of Elimelech was available (Ruth 4:3). This man was interested in acquiring the property as was his right according to the laws of inheritance dictated by Moses (Numbers 27:11). Boaz then informed him of the existence of Ruth and reminded him that he would have an obligation to Ruth to fulfill the Law of the Levirate (Ruth 4:5).

The response of this other unnamed relative was "No." He recognized that the property would never belong to him but would be inherited by a child of Ruth. Moreover, it could jeopardize the inheritance rights of any other child he might have from his wife. Furthermore, he would have an obligation and responsibility to assist in raising the child (Ruth 4:6). So he followed another custom in which he removed his sandal from his foot to indicate symbolically that he was "lifting up his foot from what was his right" (Ruth 4:7,8). This meant that legally he had given up his rights to function as a levirate, as the kinsman (the closest male relative), and the right would now go to Boaz, who was the next closest kinsmen. If Ruth did not produce a child from Boaz, then the property would go to Boaz.

The story reveals that Boaz's interests were more than to function as a levirate. He had fallen in love with Ruth and wanted her to become his wife. Verses 9 through 12 record the legal declaration of Boaz, the blessing of the elders and judges, and a direct reference to Pharez, the son of Tamar and Judah and ancestor of Boaz. Note Ruth 4:22,23 where the text makes it plain that Naomi had received an heir (son) from a kinsman-redeemer.

Why is this important? First, we should recognize that Obed, the first child of Ruth and Boaz, was the child of a levirate

relationship. Therefore Obed was the legitimate heir of Mahlon, the deceased husband of Ruth, and heir of Elimelech, his deceased grandfather. Ruth 1:2 has already informed us that the family of Elimelech were "Ephrathites" of Bethlehem in Judah. Remember that the birthright, the privilege of spiritual leadership of the whole house of Israel was given by Jacob, first to Joseph, and then to Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph (Genesis 48: 3,4,15-30). Elimelech was a legitimate descendant of Ephraim, and therefore had the rights of the birthright, the privilege and responsibility of spiritual leadership. When Elimelech and his two sons died, it seemed that this was the end of the genealogical line through which the birthright had been passed down. But God had a plan. Hence, the story of Ruth.

Note that both the line of Judah and the line of Ephraim were carried on by the child of a levirate relationship (Judah and Tamar, Boaz and Ruth). The beautiful part of all this is that the two families or lines come together in Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David, from whom would come the messiah, the Son of David. From Ephraim the messiah received the priesthood and from Judah he received the kingship. This is what qualified him pre-eminently for his role as messiah, our kinsman-redeemer.

Again, in true Semitic style, a story is told to make a point, and again we must ask, "What is the point of the story?" What does all this mean? The answer is important and most revealing of God's plan for Ephraim. First, the gentile was added to Ephraim, not Judah. Some Christians today call themselves "spiritual Jews." This is totally wrong, a misnomer, and completely unbiblical. There is not one statement in all of Scripture implying that gentile believers ever take the place of Judah in God's eternal plan of peace. Gentiles are added to (do not replace) Ephraim through the *mishpat banim*, and through faith, become "seed of Abraham." (Galatians 3:29).

Note that the ancestry of David contains three important blood lines. This is why the story is given in scripture. The first blood line is the family of Ephraim, the *becor*, designated heir of Jacob who held the birthright. The second is the blood line of Ruth, the gentile, who was added to Ephraim. The third blood line is that of Judah, which came through Boaz. The result of all this was that the "messianic Son of David" as messiah, and later King of Kings, has the right to represent all three groups--Ephraim, the gentiles, and Judah. I Samuel 17:12 makes an important statement that has been missed by Bible students. David is described as "the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah." There was no question in the minds of Bible writers that David belonged to the tribe of Ephraim as well as the tribe of Judah. Just as the spiritual

leadership of the twelve tribes had been given by Jacob to Joseph, it had also been passed on to Ephraim, and then on to Jesse. David was the son of Jesse. Jesus, as "Son of David," was the rightful messiah, the spiritual and royal leader of all twelve tribes because of his descent from Ephraim and Judah. These facts are important if we are to understand the fulfillment of biblical prophecies which speak of the coming of the messiah and his two roles.

The birthright or spiritual leadership of Ephraim was joined with the kingship of Judah. This established a royal house of David from which comes the "eternal Son of David." He sits on an eternal throne as the messianic King of Kings.

DAVID

David had been king in Israel (the united monarchy of 12 tribes) for some time, and had accomplished most of his goals. One evening, while in conversation with the prophet Nathan, David expressed a thought that he wanted to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. Nathan blessed the idea. But that night the Lord spoke to Nathan and chastised him. He also sent a message to David through the prophet. Both the event and the message are recorded in 2 Samuel 7: "You will not build a house (temple) for me, but I will build a house (dynasty) for you" (2 Samuel 7:5-14). When the Lord spoke to the prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-22) he gave promise of a messianic prophet. When he spoke through Nathan to King David, he gave promise of a messianic king (2 Samuel 7:12-14). It should not be difficult for us to understand these images or pictures of the messiah and his roles. The messianic prophet was to be the role of the messiah in the present age. Isaiah referred to him as the "suffering servant" (Isaiah 53). The messianic king, who is also identified as the Son of David who sits on an eternal throne, comes at the end of this age and rules in righteousness in the age to come.

The implication of this identification of the messiah as Son of David is important. When a person refers to the northern kingdom or Ephraim as "the ten lost tribes," he is suggesting that the northern tribes were destroyed--that Joseph is *tarof toraf*--utterly destroyed. If Ephraim ceased in 722/721 BCE., then messiah could not have come as Christians claim, nor could he ever come as Jews claim he will. This is contrary to the thinking and messages of the prophets, which is *`od Yosef hai!* Joseph still lives! All of the prophets speak of the return of Ephraim-Joseph-Jacob-Israel, names used for the northern kingdom of the 10 tribes. We must look at these messages of the prophets to discover Ephraim in God's plan of peace. The continuity of Ephraim and the blessings that were to come through him are associated with the messianic Son of David in the writings of the prophets.

Upon the death of David, his son Solomon (son of Bathsheba) was crowned king (1 Kings 1:28-35). During his reign, Solomon indulged in treaty marriages with the daughters of chieftains surrounding his kingdom. In this way he secured his borders from neighboring tribal marauders and developed lucrative trade routes along the ancient King's Highway and the Via Maris.

A negative result of Solomon's policies was that taxation on the Israelites was increased to support the large palace entourage (700 wives, 300 concubines and the pagan cults of his foreign

women: cf. 1 Kings 11:3). This taxation became an excessive burden on the people. Upon the death of Solomon, the people hoped for relief from excessive taxation. However, Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, refused to alleviate the tax burden, and chose instead to increase it (1 Kings 12:1-15). The result was the breakup of the kingdom into two parts. The northern kingdom became known as Jacob, Israel, Joseph, Ephraim and Samaria. The southern kingdom was called Judah. An interesting biblical narrative reveals that all this was according to a divine plan.

"About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon's father, did. But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who observed my commands and statutes. I will take the kingdom from his son's hands and give you ten tribes. I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name. However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. I will humble David's

descendants because of this, but not forever.' Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon's death." (1 Kings 11:29-40)

The fulfillment of this prophecy is what lays down a foundation for subsequent events in the history of Judah and Israel during the prophetic period. It cannot be overly stressed that there was a difference between Judah and Israel in the minds of the prophets. Today, Christians tend to forget or ignore these facts and use the names "Judah" and "Israel" as though they were synonyms for the same people or kingdoms. That is incorrect and prevents a clear understanding of the biblical messages. A Bible student must remember that there were two kingdoms, Israel-Ephraim-Joseph-Jacob-Samaria in the north, and Judah in the south. Keeping this in mind will make it much easier to understand the messages and predictions of the prophets.

Before leaving the Solomonic period, it is important to note that it was Solomon who introduced idolatry into Israel when he allowed his foreign wives to build pagan shrines and permitted pagan cult practices. After Solomon introduced idolatry into Israel, Israel was never able to completely rid herself of this curse. Idolatry resulted in the downfall of Israel and Judah, and its effects are to be seen in rabbinic Judaism and traditional Christianity.

Solomon is remembered for building a beautiful temple. Think about it. He incorporated pagan symbolism into the decoration of this temple which was never known as "the house of the Lord," but always remembered (even today) as "Solomon's Temple." It became a monument to the folly of the wisest man who ever lived.

THE PROPHETS

The following material, taken from the writings of the latter prophets is arranged chronologically. The *Tanakh* arranges them as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. We have followed this. So the first three prophets to be studied are Isaiah from the eighth century BCE., Jeremiah from the seventh century BCE., and Ezekiel from the sixth century BCE. Each wrote extensively on "Ephraim," and their prophecies are foundational for our understanding of the subject.

The remaining prophets who spoke on the exile and restoration of Israel also are presented in chronological order. The prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. had the most to say about Israel/Ephraim. Toward the end of the prophetic period, the prophets wrote more about Judah, although Israel often was included in the promises of restoration.

The prophets are arranged as follows:

Eighth century BCE.

Joel, from 835 to 796 BCE.

Jonah, between 793 and 753 BCE.

Amos, between 791 and 753 BCE.

Hosea, before 753 BCE.

Micah, between 750 and 687 BCE.

Isaiah, between 740 and 685 BCE.

Obadiah (date uncertain)

Seventh century BCE.

Zephaniah, between 639 and 621 BCE.

Jeremiah, from 626 to 538 BCE.

Sixth century BCE.

Ezekiel, from 592 to 572 BCE.

Post-exilic

Haggai, 520 BCE.

Zechariah, 520 to 518 BCE.

Malachi, c.486 to 450 BCE.

ISAIAH

THE PROPHET

The message of the book of Isaiah can be found in the names of the prophet and his family. *Isaiah* means "*Yahweh* is salvation" and summarizes the overall message of the prophecy. The names of Isaiah's two sons outline how this would be accomplished. The first son was named *Maher-shalal-hashbaz* which means "speed spoil, hasten prey." The verbs are imperative, not imperfect. This unusual name predicts God's judgments on the house of Israel (Ephraim) and the house of Judah. The second son was named *She'ar Yashuv*, a name that is translated by the phrase "a remnant shall return." This name promises that God's judgments also would include "a return" from captivity. These names point to God's purpose in bringing judgment on his people. Note Isaiah 6:11-13. Judgment came as a result of sin, unfaithfulness to the covenant, immorality, social corruption, judicial injustice, and spiritual adultery. ". . . and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (Isaiah 8:14). The Lord's purpose in bringing judgment on Israel was to be redemptive. This idea of God bringing his people back from their unfaithfulness and redeeming them is repeated in Isaiah's prophecy.

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah's prophecy begins with God's judgments on Judah. Then in Isaiah 10:20 the prophet introduces the pending judgment on Israel. He uses words such as "survivors," "remnant," and "return," to describe the coming judgment and restoration. This chapter ends with the imagery of a forest of lofty trees cut down--a picture of judgment on Israel. Chapter 11 picks up the theme. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse (Ephraim which represented the 10 northern tribes had been cut down), and a *netzer* Branch (preserver) from his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). The key word is *netzer* which points to "preservation." The purpose of God's judgment was to preserve the house of Israel, not destroy it. Remember the words of Joseph regarding God's purpose in allowing him to be sold into Egypt: "God intended it for preservation" (Genesis 45:7). These words of Joseph were prophetic. The image of "holy seed" in the stump of the cut-down tree of Israel was first given to Isaiah in a vision in which the

Lord called him to prophetic ministry. God's judgment would come on stubborn people who would not hear him, and only a stump would be left, but the holy seed would be in the stump (Isaiah 6:9-13). Chapter 11 goes on to identify the offspring of Jesse as fulfilling a messianic role, and verse 11 speaks of a remnant of the northern tribes being preserved.

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE OF RESTORATION

It is important for us to look at Isaiah 11 in detail. Consider first the word *netzer* in verse 1. The dictionary definition¹⁰ of the verb is "to preserve," or "to guard." The noun *netzer* implies "a preservation" or "a preserver." The dictionary also points out other equally important meanings or uses of this word. Also note the use of this word as a name for "Christians"--the *notzrim*, meaning either "the preservers" or "the preserved ones." This name implies two important objectives. First, the *netzer* was to preserve Israel. It was not God's purpose to destroy or wipe out the ten northern tribes of Ephraim. His purpose in judgment was to bring about repentance, a return to the covenant (Isaiah 31:6,7) and restoration. The *netzer* was to accomplish this task. He was to preserve Israel. The messiah was to re-establish all twelve tribes (or he would not be the messiah).

The second objective is for us to recognize the close relationship that the believing gentile (biblical Christian) has with Israel (restored Ephraim), a relationship in which biblical Christianity should participate in the preservation of Israel (biblical Judaism). In the same dictionary Christianity is defined as "the *torah* of Jesus the *netzer*." Here Jewish scholars recognize and acknowledge that Jesus is the *netzer*, and by virtue of his office, he would accomplish this task. Biblical Christianity is to preserve biblical Judaism--a knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christians should be preservers of Israel (read Ephesians 2).

If Christianity is part of the divine plan of peace, then should it not have been foretold by the prophets of Israel? "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). In Isaiah 11:1 we find this fact to be true. A Jewish friend pointed this out to me from the Hebrew text of Isaiah 11:1. His comment was that here Isaiah predicted the

¹⁰ *English - Hebrew Dictionary*, ed. Israel Ephros Ph. D., Judah Ibn Shmuel Kaufman Ph. D., Benjamin Silk B. C. L. Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing Company.

coming of Christianity as part of God's perfect plan. The word *netzer* also appears in other texts.

Isaiah 11:10 informs us that this root of Jesse would become a *nes* ensign (or rallying point) for the *goyim* nations/gentiles who would gather around him. Jesus certainly fulfilled this prediction as witnessed by the spread of Christianity among the nations of the world. Christianity has revealed the God of Israel to the nations.

Verse 10 ends with a prediction that "his place of rest would be glorious." This points to the crucifixion of Jesus. Originally, the cross was a Roman instrument of torture and shameful death reserved for criminals. An Israelite who was hanged was considered "cursed" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Now the cross has become a symbol of hope and salvation for God's people everywhere (Galatians 3:13). The words of the gospel song "The Old Rugged Cross" are descriptive of this development.

"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame. . .
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died
To pardon and sanctify me."

At this point we must note the historical background to these events. The northern kingdom was variously called "Jacob," "Israel," "Joseph," or "Ephraim" by the prophets. Sometimes it was also called "Samaria," a name taken either from the geographic region or the capital city. The prophets use all these names to refer to the same people. The breakaway of ten tribes, which became the northern kingdom, was led by Jeroboam, son of Nebat, an Ephraimite (1 Kings 11:26). This was according to God's plan. The story is recorded in 1 Kings 11:26 to 1 Kings 12:24. The tribe of Ephraim, which received the birthright (spiritual leadership) from Jacob through Joseph, became the leading tribe of this northern confederacy formed after the death of Solomon. Hence, Ephraim became a name symbolic of the northern kingdom.

In spite of repeated warnings from the prophets, Israel/Ephraim continued in her unfaithfulness, idolatry, and apostasy. The Assyrian army under Shalmaneser V invaded Israel. Sargon II, successor to Shalmaneser, destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 BCE. The Assyrian policy was to depopulate a conquered territory. Survivors were scattered (no two members of a family ever to meet again) to various parts of the empire. Other people were brought in to occupy the land. (This is when the Samaritans came to Samaria. Read II Kings 17:22-39).

The southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar a century later in 597 BCE. The

reasons for the conquest of Judah were the same as those for the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel (see II Chronicles 36:9-20). However, the Babylonians had a different policy for dealing with survivors. They transported their captives as a group to Babylon where they lived as a community of Jewish people. Names on tablets from the period indicate that Jewish people soon became part of Babylonian life, performing banking, commerce, and other services. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted captivity for a period of 70 years (Jeremiah 25:8-11). Following this period in the year 457 BCE., the exiles of Judah returned and rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, the city walls, and eventually the temple.

Because the exiles of the northern kingdom never returned as a group, they are frequently referred to as "the ten lost tribes." Some people, such as those who teach British Israelism, have attempted to identify the tribes among the nations of Europe. Their efforts are erroneous, speculative, and based on faulty interpretation of evidence.

Note Isaiah 11:11,12. The prophet clearly predicts that "the Lord will set his hand a second time to recover the remnant of Jacob." It is God's plan to bring back the exiles of Ephraim from every corner of the world where they have been scattered. This is a prophecy about the future, about what the Lord will accomplish at the end of the age. The prophet is very specific. "He will . . . gather the exiles of Israel . . ." (Isaiah 11:12). We may not know who the exiles of Israel are at the present time or where they may be, but the Lord knows. We can be sure that this prophecy, as all others, will be fulfilled. The promise to restore the twelve tribes and gather the exiles of the northern kingdom of Israel is repeated throughout the prophecies of Isaiah and other prophets (See Isaiah 27, especially verses 12,13).

What was God's plan for restoring Ephraim? Can we know? Again the prophet Isaiah gives us some insights. Details for the divine plan are found in chapter 66:7,8: "As soon as she travailed Zion brought forth her children." Could this be a pointed reference to Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, "the *netzer*"? At his birth the *netzer* was to re-establish Ephraim, to preserve Israel (Micah 5:2,3). When the *netzer* established the *notzrim* (Christians) did it also coincide with the re-establishment of Ephraim and thus the re-establishment of all twelve tribes (the "Children of Zion")? Did the birth of Jesus signal the rebirth or re-establishment of Ephraim? Gentiles who believe are called *notzrim*, or "preservers," and through the *mishpat banim* are added to Ephraim, the scattered northern tribes. Isaiah makes several references to the nations among which Ephraim was

scattered (Isaiah 11:10-12). These references speak of the "four quarters of the earth," and "the islands of the sea." Such expressions indicate the universality of the dispersion of Ephraim among the nations, on the day when she is re-gathered.

The "servant songs" of the prophecy of Isaiah have attracted the attention of biblical scholars over the centuries. Although they are concerned primarily with Israel, the gentiles also are included. The first servant song tells us that *Yahweh* the Lord puts his spirit on his servant, with the result that the servant will bring forth justice to the *goyim* nations/gentiles (Isaiah 42:1). Furthermore, Israel was to be "a light for the gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6). Then follows a statement which Jesus later picks up as a prophetic description of how his messianic ministry would be characterized (Luke 4:18): "To open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (Isaiah 42:7). Next, this servant song turns to praise for the Lord because of "the new things" he would declare (Isaiah 42:9,10).

In this passage on praise the prophet makes two interesting comments. "Let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice" (Isaiah 42:11). Kedar was the second son of Ishmael through whom some Arab genealogists trace the ancestry of the prophet Mohammed. In the biblical period, Kedarites were the people we identify today as Arabs. "Let the people of Sela sing for joy" (Isaiah 42:11). Sela was a city of the Edomites, who were considered traditional enemies of Israel and Judah. Here we must note that God's plan for peace and its blessing extends to the gentile neighbors of Israel.

In Isaiah 43 the Lord identifies himself as Israel's only savior. He gives a promise of restoration. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north 'Give them up!' and to the south 'Do not hold them back!' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth--everyone who is called by my name" (Isaiah 43:5-7). "All the *goyim* nations/gentiles gather together and the peoples assemble" (Isaiah 43:9). The Lord repeats his promise of blessing on Jacob/Israel (Isaiah 44:1). "I will pour out my spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants" (Isaiah 44:3). Furthermore, the prophet predicts a time when people will commit themselves to God (Isaiah 44:5) and will take the name Israel (Isaiah 44:5) by joining themselves to God's chosen family.

God is to be praised because "he made Israel his servant" (Isaiah 44:21) and redeemed Israel (Isaiah 44:23). The glory of God is to be seen in his great redemptive acts. The Lord will fulfill his plans and bring to pass the predictions of the prophets (Isaiah 44:24-

28). Just as God's covenant with Abraham was eternal, so God's salvation for Israel will be eternal. "All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgrace; they will go off into disgrace together. But Israel will be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced to ages everlasting" (Isaiah 45:16,17).

God's universal invitation is given. "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22). There is only one true God, and salvation is his work on our behalf. It is a matter of personal choice whether one will recognize, accept and worship him or not. But the day is coming when all will acknowledge that he is God. ". . . before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.' All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame" (Isaiah 45:23,24).

In the Lord "all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult" (Isaiah 45:25). This is predictive of how Paul viewed believing gentiles as recipients of God's grace, added to the house of Israel, and righteous by faith (Romans 10,11).

In Isaiah 46 the prophet presents a clear picture of the futility of idolatry. As creations of men, idols are completely worthless. Even though the prophet is speaking specifically about the idols of Babylon, the principles apply to all idolatry.

In the second servant song, the glory of God would be seen in what he would do in Israel (Isaiah 49:3). Here is a prediction of what God would do through Israel to bring the blessing of Abraham to the gentiles. The servant's task is "to bring Jacob back to him" (Isaiah 49:5). The sense of the Hebrew text is in the form of a rhetorical question: "Is it possible that Israel will not be gathered back?" In verse 6 the prophet reminds us that this is a light (easy) task for the Lord. He included a promise to restore the tribes of Jacob, to *shuv* the *notzrim* of Israel (to restore the "preserved" of Israel). This would bring light to the gentiles so that God's salvation would reach to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). The Lord repeats his concern for the gentiles. "See, I will beckon to the gentiles, and I will lift up my banner to the peoples" (Isaiah 49:22).

Isaiah 49:6-12 is most significant. In verse 6 Isaiah uses the word *yeshua`tiy*, which is correctly translated as "my salvation." Then in verse 7 the prophet mentions the "Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One." He points out that this messianic individual is despised by men, but he would become the focus of worship. "Kings shall see and arise, princes shall prostrate themselves . . ." (Isaiah 49:7). Then the prophet continues, and we must pay careful attention to his

words. "In an acceptable time (at the appropriate time) I have answered thee, and in the *yom yashua`* day of salvation I have helped thee" (Isaiah 49:8). Note that it is correct to translate the expression *yom yashua`* as the "day of salvation," but also recognize that it is equally correct and valid to translate it as the "day of *yashua`*," the Hebrew name for Jesus. Some see in this a direct reference to the identity of the messianic person who also was presented in Isaiah 49:6 as "the Holy One." It is the same theme found in the prayers for *Shachrit* and *Musaf* in the Jewish Prayer Book: ". . . the Lord our God . . . He is our God . . . He is our Redeemer." (See Isaiah 63:16.)

What follows is also dramatic, because it picks up an earlier theme by Isaiah. The passage continues: "And I will *netzer* preserve thee" (cf. Isaiah 11:1 where the identity of the messianic person as a *netzer* "preserver" of Israel is presented). Then follow the promises of the restoration of Israel and the land which this messianic person will accomplish (Isaiah 49:8-12). The end of verse 12 contains an interesting reference. After the prophet mentions the re-gathering of Israel from the four corners of the earth, he specifically includes "these from the land of Sinim." This is a reference to China. God's people Israel will be found in every part of the world among every people on the day he gathers them. Cultural diversity or appearances should never blind us as to who the children of God might be.

Note that it is all the "tribes" which are restored and not merely one tribe such as Judah. The divine promise of restoration included both families of Israel--the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). The biblical concept of the remnant does not refer to a portion of the twelve tribes, but includes all twelve tribes in the restoration. Verse 6 includes a promise to raise up the tribes of Jacob.

Isaiah's definition of the servant's task is "to bring Jacob back to him" (Isaiah 49:5). Furthermore, the servant was "to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel" (Isaiah 49:6). Here Isaiah's definition of the servant's task correlates with his description of the "shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1). The word used is *netzer* and implies "a preservation." The role of the messiah is "to preserve Israel." This is contrary to the thinking of some Christians who hold to a replacement theory in which Israel is rejected by God, and Christianity replaces Israel as the recipient of God's promises. This idea is a denial of the prophetic revelation of the role of the messiah. Christian thought should be consistent with the teaching of the prophets, and the Apostle Paul, who understood the prophetic picture of the gentiles and their relationship to

Israel/Ephraim and Judah, and attempted to explain this in his epistles (see Ephesians 2 and 3).

The Apostle Paul used a number of expressions that reinforce this relationship. "Adoption" is one such expression (Galatians 4:5). Another is "grafted in" (Romans 11:17), indicating that through the *mispat banim* gentiles were "added to" or "brought into" God's family with all the rights and privileges of "sons and daughters." The Hebrew New Testament uses the expression *mishpat baniym*, "the law of sonship." The gentile's approach to God was based on faith, the same faith expressed by Abraham when it is said that "he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:7-9, 14, 26). Paul goes so far as to state that the gentile who comes to God through faith (Romans 3:22), by virtue of what Jesus, the messiah/*netzer*, has done, is qualified to be "seed of Abraham" (Galatians 3:29) and to share in all the promises and blessings given to Abraham and his seed/heirs (Ephesian 2 and 3; especially 3:6).

In Chapter 56 Isaiah deals with the question of who is to receive God's salvation. The prophet's statements not only refer to the inclusion of the gentiles in God's plan, but also touch on implications of Israel's return.

In verse 1 Isaiah informs us that this is direct instruction from the Lord. He then proceeds to write in the first person. Here is an excellent example of the prophetic gift--a person speaking for God. He gives emphasis to justice, morality, and ethics (Isaiah 56:1), and furthermore, God's future actions will reveal his righteousness (Isaiah 56:1). Next, the prophet informs that Sabbath observance is evidence of faithfulness to the Lord (Isaiah 56:2).

Now the Lord speaks directly to the gentiles. Any gentile who is a worshiper of the Lord, is prohibited from regarding himself as a "second class citizen" of the household of faith or as spiritually inferior to those who are blood descendants of Abraham, by the accident of birth. The prophet also adds that celibate individuals ("eunuchs" in the NIV) are accepted by God. Mutilation or lack of sexual performance for whatever reason does not exclude a person from being accepted by God or blessed by God (Isaiah 56:3,4). God's favor is assured to those who keep the Sabbath, please God in their actions, and maintain the covenant (Isaiah 56:5).

Gentiles are again addressed as foreigners. The prophet is speaking to gentiles who believe in God and have committed their lives to him. The genuineness of belief is evidenced by the following five characteristics: 1. They serve the Lord. 2. They appreciate and love the name (the person) of the Lord. 3. They worship the Lord, a

reference to their recognition that he is Creator. 4. They faithfully observe the Sabbath. 5. They hold fast to God's covenant as revealed in his promises (Isaiah 56:6). Such foreigners (gentiles) will be brought by the Lord to his holy city and to his holy temple to bless them. Their sacrifices, offerings, and praises (even if according to different customs) will be accepted by God (Isaiah 56:3).

Now follows a dramatic summary statement that defies the religious exclusiveness practiced by so many who claim to be worshipers of the Lord. Exclusion (prejudice) is evidenced in some Jewish and Christian congregations, as though there was a posted sign which read: "This is God's house. You don't belong here because you are different." People may be excluded because of race, color, religious beliefs, cultural differences, language, or other reasons. But no one has the right to exclude another in God's name from worshiping in his temple. "My house (synagogue, temple or church) shall be called a house of prayer for all *amim* people" (Isaiah 56:7). This is a shout of triumph making possible the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. The nations/gentiles are included in God's family.

The prophet identifies the Lord as the one who gathers the exiles of Israel (Isaiah 56:8). Carefully note the following statement by God, which is a direct reference to the gentiles: "I will gather still others (gentiles) to them (Israel) besides those already gathered (Israelite returnees). "Can there be any question that God's salvation is intended for all men and women, Jewish and gentile?"

There are Christians who mistakenly teach that "seed of Abraham" means that they are "spiritual Jews." However, there is nothing in scripture to support such a view. Judah remains distinct from other people to the end of the age. Neither has God rejected Israel (Romans 11:1). Gentile believers are added to reborn Ephraim/Israel as *notzrim*. One does not replace the other. Christianity never replaces or displaces Judaism in God's plan. In Paul's imagery the "wild olive branches" (believing gentiles) were grafted in "among" other branches (believing Israelites and Jews, Romans 11:17). Christians and Jews need to understand this and respect each others' place in God's plan for redemption. The "gospel of the circumcision" and the "gospel of the uncircumcision" are distinct from each other, and each has legitimacy (Galatians 2:7).

Believers, Jewish or Christian, should not be surprised at God's plan. Two thousand seven hundred years ago the prophet Isaiah described this in detail: "The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and settle them in their own

land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob" (Isaiah 14:1,2).

JEREMIAH

THE PROPHET

The prophet Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah (Jeremiah 1:1), a priest of Anathoth. Little is known about his background. He may have been a descendant of Abiathar (I Kings 2:26). His call to prophetic office is dated to the 13th year of Josiah, 626 BCE. (Jeremiah 1:2), when he was a "youth" (Jeremiah 1:6). His last words are dated to shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. (Jeremiah 44). Thus, his ministry covered a period of at least forty years.

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY

The messages of Jeremiah were directed mainly to Judah. In spite of frequent warnings of judgment (Jeremiah 5:15), the northern kingdom had been destroyed by the Assyrians and its people taken into captivity. Jeremiah used this as an example of what was going to happen to Judah (Jeremiah 3:6-8; 7:15). The reasons were the same: idolatry and unfaithfulness to the covenant (Jeremiah 11:10,17; 23:13). Jeremiah addressed his appeals for reform both to Judah and to Israel (Jeremiah 4:1,2). In this context Jeremiah made a number of statements about God's plan for the two families of Ephraim and Judah (Jeremiah 5:11; 13:11). Jeremiah's understanding of God's plan was the same as that of Isaiah.

Note that early in his prophecy Jeremiah introduces the *notzrim*. "'For hark! one proclaims from Dan, and announces calamity from from the hills of Ephraim: make ye mention to the *goyim* (nations/gentiles). Behold . . . publish concerning Jerusalem . . . *notzrim* (preservers) come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah.'" (Jeremiah 4:15,16).

This statement is intriguing and enlightening when one remembers that some Christians have difficulty identifying the *notzrim*. Here, the *notzrim* obviously are people from among the *goyim* gentiles (nations), and they come up against Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. This seems to closely parallel and express the same ideas as a statement by Jesus: "Jerusalem will be trampled upon by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Jeremiah made it plain that it was the sins of Judah which caused this situation (Jeremiah 4:17). One might ask, "If the *notzrim* are gentile believers in God, added to the house or family of Ephraim, then why were they against Jerusalem?" We must remember that for centuries *sinas chinum* enmity has existed between Judah and Ephraim, and only in the age to come will this unwarranted hatred be removed (see Isaiah 11:12,13) by the messianic Son of David (Ezekiel 37:15-28).

The judgment on Jacob (northern kingdom) was complete (Jeremiah 10:25). God's judgment would fall on all the "uncircumcised in heart" (Jeremiah 9:25,26). But Israel would not be completely destroyed (Jeremiah 5:18; 30:11). The purpose of God's judgment was to bring about repentance (Jeremiah 25) which ultimately would result in restoration and the gathering of Israel (Jeremiah 23:3,4,7,8; 30:3,9,10,18). Repentance is a first step in the process of restoration (Jeremiah 15:19).

The days of God's judgments on Israel in the period of her captivity are contrasted with the joy that will come after her restoration. Just as Israel looked to the past, to the Exodus from Egypt, as a time of rejoicing in God's great redemptive act, so the day would come when modern Israelites would look back on the restoration with similar rejoicing and appreciation. "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said: 'As the Lord liveth, that brought the children of Israel out of Egypt,' but: 'As the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the countries whither He had driven them:' and I will bring them back into their land that I gave unto their fathers" (Jeremiah 16:14,15). God did not intend to restore Israel to the same condition as before the exile. An example is given of a potter (Jeremiah 18:5-10) and God states, "I will reshape you."

The judgment on Israel would be repeated on Judah (Jeremiah 24:4,5), and the prediction of judgment also contained a promise of restoration for Judah (Jeremiah 24:6,7). Not only would the judgment of God bring about repentance but also would result in the gentiles acquiring a true knowledge of God and turning to him (Jeremiah 16:19-21). At the end of the age "Jacob" and "Judah" would be saved. "The Son of David" would rule over them (Jeremiah 23:5,6), and the ruler or governor would come from Jacob/Ephraim (Jeremiah 30:21).

RESTORATION IN JEREMIAH

In Chapters 31 to 33 the prophet focuses on the restoration of Israel and Judah. His predictions are precise and to the point. There

can not be any confusion about what the prophet had in mind. Let us note specific details in this passage of scripture.

God identifies himself as "the God of all Israel" (all 12 tribes) and states that they would be his people (Jeremiah 31:1). This theme of "the people of God" is found several times in Jeremiah and all through Scripture and accurately expresses the idea of the covenant. The survivors of God's judgments have found favor with him (Jeremiah 31:2) and become objects of his love (Jeremiah 31:3). Restoration is promised (Jeremiah 31:4), and an interesting expression is used to describe the completeness of Israel's restoration. She is addressed as "O virgin Israel" (Jeremiah 31:4), a complete opposite of the word "adulteress" used to describe Israel's idolatry (cf. Hosea).

Jeremiah 31:6 is predictive. "There will come a day when *notzrim* (preservers) will cry from Mount Ephraim" inviting God's people to Zion. Note the prophet's choice of the word *notzrim* and consider its significance for Christians. God is praised for his restoration of Jacob, the remnant people of God (Jeremiah 31:7). For the concept of a "remnant" of Jacob see Isaiah 11:11). The Lord then promises that he will gather them by bringing them back from the distant parts of the world where they have been scattered (Jeremiah 31:8). There will be a great company of returning exiles (Jeremiah 31:8).

We cannot ignore the Lord's reason for his compassion. "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my *becor* first-born" (Jeremiah 31:9). Here is the Lord's promise that Israel will survive the captivity and God's judgments on her. The birthright or spiritual leadership belonged to Ephraim, and it is essential for Ephraim to survive so that all Israel can be saved (Romans 10:1; 11:1,2,5,26,27). Again a gathering is promised. "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (Jeremiah 31:10). Why? "For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him . . ." (Jeremiah 31:11). Then follows a passage in which Jeremiah describes the great joy of God's people in final restoration.

Jeremiah 31:15 begins a significant passage. Rachel is described as "weeping for her children (Ephraim) . . . because they were not" (Jeremiah 31:15). According to our human perceptions, Joseph/Ephraim is *tarof toraf*, totally destroyed (the "ten lost tribes"). But the Lord has a plan for Ephraim who is the *becor* first-born. Note the Lord's response. "Refrain your voice from weeping . . . they shall come again from the land of the enemy" (Jeremiah 31:16). "Thy children (Ephraim) shall come again to their own border" (Jeremiah 31:17). Could the prophet be more specific? Yet there are

those who attempt to discount this passage as though either the Lord or the prophet made a mistake. They suggest that such a gathering and restoration are impossible.

Ultimately, Ephraim is repentant (Jeremiah 31:18,19), and God remembers how special Ephraim is to him (Jeremiah 31:20). Again Israel is addressed as a "virgin," indicating the completeness of God's forgiveness and restoration of Israel. Jeremiah makes an interesting and significant prediction with a dual fulfillment. When Israel is restored to her land, she will live together in the towns of Judah and people will greet each other with "the Lord bless you." She will also use the same language as the people in the time of Jeremiah. "Yet again they shall use this speech (language) in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall turn their captivity" (Jeremiah 31:23). It is significant that today biblical Hebrew is the foundation for modern Hebrew, the official language of the State of Israel. What modern nation has ever returned to the language or dialect she used more than two thousand five hundred years before? The prophetic word is always fulfilled. Like the prophet Isaiah, so Jeremiah also recognizes that God has two families--"the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:27). Again, the prophet predicts restoration, a theme he frequently repeats (Jeremiah 31:28).

Now the prophet introduces the notion of a new covenant to benefit both houses of Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 31:31). This new covenant was to be different than that made at Sinai (Jeremiah 31:32). Instead of being written on tables of stone, this covenant was to be written in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). The Hebrew expression for "new covenant" is *brit hadashah*, which translated also means "a new testament." Again the words selected by the prophet are significant. This new covenant or testament would result in a restoration of the relationship: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33. See also Revelation 20:3).

Jeremiah 31:31-33 presents a challenge to many Christians. Here the prophet promises a "new covenant." There are Christians who think this is a covenant made with them. Such thinking ignores the biblical text. Note that the Lord states this is a covenant he makes with the house of Israel and the house of Judah--not with the gentiles. In fact, if you search all through Scripture you will not find any covenant which the Lord makes with the gentiles. The covenant is made with Israel, and only as god-fearing gentiles are added to the "House of Israel" will they share in the fulfillment of these promises.

How sure can we be about Jeremiah's predictions and that God will keep his word? Could some future event or circumstance

cause him to change his mind? Could a change in conditions cause the Lord to cancel his promises or transfer them to someone else? If a person has any question, then note the Lord's oath of fidelity to his promised word. He appeals to the constancy of nature, the constancy of planetary movement in the cosmos with resultant order of day and night. He also appeals to the phenomenon of nature which marks the shoreline as a boundary for the roaring sea (Jeremiah 31:35,36). If these ordinances of nature could be changed, then Israel would cease forever. Similarly, if man could master all knowledge of the cosmos and the heavenly bodies, or plumb the depths of the oceans and comprehend the delicate balance of nature to be found there, then the Lord would cancel his promise and covenant with Ephraim and all the seed of Israel (Jeremiah 31:37). In light of this clear, strong statement, how can a person think that Israel (Jacob-Joseph-Ephraim-Samaria) was annihilated in 722/721 BCE. or that God's promises are not sure, but conditional? God's promises and prophetic words are sure. Chapter 31 ends with a prediction of the restoration of the holy city. Jeremiah 32 begins with a prediction that Babylon would conquer Judah (Jeremiah 32:1-5). Then the Lord asks the prophet to take symbolic action and purchase property from his uncle. In spite of the captivity there would be a return. Jeremiah's purchase was to inspire confidence in God's promise (Jeremiah 32:6-37).

Now the prophet presents detailed reasons for God's judgments on Judah and Israel. Both had worshiped Baal (Jeremiah 32:29,30). Idolatry had permeated every level of society (Jeremiah 32:32), and was also practiced in the temple (Jeremiah 32:42). This idolatry had sunk to its greatest depths--child sacrifices were being offered to Moloch (Jeremiah 32:35).

Along with the messages of condemnation and judgment, the prophet brings a message of hope, restoration, and gathering (Jeremiah 32:37,38). This restoration includes a change of heart (Jeremiah 32:39), and a new relationship based on a new covenant (Jeremiah 32:40-42), which would result in rejoicing for God's people (Jeremiah 32:43,44). The promise concludes with a renewed assurance: "I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 32:44).

Jeremiah 33 is a message the prophet received while a prisoner (Jeremiah 33:1) and is a repeat of his first message of doom against Judah (Jeremiah 33:4,5). Again, the message of doom includes a promise of restoration and gathering for both houses of Judah and Israel (Jeremiah 33:6-9,14). This return and restoration would include the temple, where proper worship would be reinstated

(Jeremiah 33:11,18). The greatest blessing of the restoration would be the coming of the "Son of David" as the messianic king (Jeremiah 33:15-17).

The prophet repeats God's guarantee of prophetic fulfillment. If you can change the order of day and night, then the covenant with David will be broken (Jeremiah 33:20,21). Just as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea cannot be counted, so the "seed of David" will be multiplied. This is a repeat of the promise of "seed" made to Abraham (Genesis 13:16; 15:5), and the promise made to Ephraim (Genesis 48:16,19) that he would become a multitude of nations. Think about the "great multitude, which no man could number" at the end of the age (Revelation 7:9). It must be a fulfillment of these promises.

Now Jeremiah discusses an attitude of people in his day--an attitude also held by many in our day about the destinies of Israel and Judah. This is the idea that the captivities of Israel and Judah meant that God had rejected all twelve tribes (Jeremiah 33:24). Jeremiah's statement is amazing, especially in light of opinions expressed by many Christians that God has rejected the "ten lost tribes" and the Jews because they rejected him at the crucifixion of Jesus, and that now all the promises made to Israel have been transferred to the "church" as "spiritual Jews" or "imitation Jews." There is not one scrap of biblical evidence to support such an opinion. It is also a denial of God's plan for and predictions about Israel and Judah. The Lord repeats his guarantee. If the Divine order of creation could be changed, then the seed of Jacob (the twelve tribes) would be rejected, and the covenant with David canceled (Jeremiah 33:25,26).

The remainder of Jeremiah's prophecy deals with the destruction of Judah by Babylon and God's judgments on the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. Several statements should be noted. Jews who had escaped the Babylonians and fled to Egypt (against God's specific word to remain in Judah) were worshiping the gods of Egypt. This was a continuation of idolatry. They had not learned their lesson and so would be destroyed (Jeremiah 44:8). But Jacob would return from captivity. There would be a remnant whom the Lord had corrected (Jeremiah 46:27,28).

Chapter 50 provides a few more details. Babylon herself would be conquered (Jeremiah 50:1-3) and Judah and Israel restored (Jeremiah 50:4). This restoration would take place because repentance and reformation had been accomplished (Jeremiah 50:20).

We must remember that God has never forsaken Israel or Judah (Jeremiah 51:5). Israel will become "the rod of God's inheritance" to accomplish his purposes (Jeremiah 51:19).

EZEKIEL

THE PROPHET

Ezekiel was the son of Buzi and a member of a priestly family (Ezekiel 2:3). He grew up in Palestine (probably in Jerusalem) and was taken into exile 597/596 BCE. (Ezekiel 33:21; 2 Kings 24:11 ff.) when he was 25 years of age (Ezekiel 1:1). Five years later, at the age of thirty (Ezekiel 1:1), he was called to prophetic office.

Ezekiel was happily married, but the sudden death of his wife was used as a sign to Israel (Ezekiel 24:15 ff.). He had his own house in the exile, at Tel Abib (Ezekiel 3:15) on the Great Canal (Ezekiel 1:1; 3:15), near Nippur, to which the elders came for counsel (Ezekiel 8:1). He dates certain revelations to the year of the exile (YE.), beginning with the exile of the king (596 BCE. = 1 YE.). His call came in YE. 5, and the last recorded revelation came in YE. 27 (=570 BCE.), indicating that his prophetic ministry extended over at least 23 years.

EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY

Ezekiel's messages contained many visions and also included strange behavior in acting out certain prophecies. He speaks of being transported from Babylon to Jerusalem and back again by the Spirit (or wind). "Ecstatic," "visionary," "neurotic," "psychotic," and "schizophrenic," are among the terms used to describe him. His behavior was abnormal, but what is normal when we are dealing with a prophet? He is described as "preacher" and "prophet," "pastor" and "priest." Some regard him as the "father of Judaism." He taught the people to "sing songs in the night." He wrote excellent poetry. He prophesied during the Babylonian exile, which was coterminous with the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Life in exile was acceptable. The Babylonians were not out to punish the people they conquered. They merely took steps to prevent rebellion and kept the captives of Judah together as a group. Thus the Babylonian policy made it possible for the Judeans (Jews of Judah) to return from captivity.

The prophecy of Ezekiel can be divided into three sections. The first section (Ezekiel 1:1 through 24:27) deals with God's

judgments on Judah and Israel. The second section (Ezekiel 25:1 through 32:32) describes God's judgments on the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. The third section (Ezekiel 33:1 through 48:35) deals with restoration. Each of these sections may be subdivided. Our interest is in the third section, which may be subdivided thus: Ezekiel 33:1 to 34:31, restoration of the "true shepherd"; Ezekiel 35:1 to 36:38, restoration of the land; Ezekiel 37:1 to 39:29, gathering and restoration of the people; Ezekiel 40:1 to 43:27, restoration of the temple; Ezekiel 44:1 to 46:24, restoration of true worship; and Ezekiel 47:1 to 48:35, visions of the river of life, the holy city, and the holy land.

Ezekiel's messages of gathering and restoration were for both the houses of Judah and Israel. If the prophet was mistaken about the gathering and restoration of the house of Israel, the "northern kingdom," then why should we place any confidence in the rest of his prophecy? If Ezekiel's prophecy is faulty, as some imply, then it has no place in the canon of Holy Scripture, because Ezekiel would be a "false prophet."

RESTORATION IN EZEKIEL

Gathering and restoration are key messages of Ezekiel. They are tied to messages of God's judgments, which are redemptive in purpose. The theme "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" is repeated frequently in the prophecy.

The passages about the restoration of Israel begin in chapter 33. The prophet (Ezekiel) is called to be a watchman for the house of Israel (Ezekiel 33:7). His message is directed to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 33:10) and deals with questions of individual responsibility. Ezekiel then makes an appeal for reformation: "Why will you die, O house of Israel." (Ezekiel 33:11). Some were feeling that God was not fair in his judgments. "Yet, O house of Israel, you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to his own ways" (Ezekiel 33:20). It must have been difficult for people to accept the destruction as a fulfillment of God's word, which they had refused.

Ezekiel 34 is a prophecy against the false shepherds of the house of Israel (Ezekiel 34:2). God's judgments were going to fall on these false spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:2-10). But God is concerned for his people, and so his flock is rescued (Ezekiel 34:11). The historic context for this redemptive act of God is given. Israel had been taken into captivity and scattered in 722/721 BCE. "I will

rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land" (Ezekiel 34:12,13). There can be no question about God's intentions: "I will save my flock" (Ezekiel 34:22).

Ultimately the false shepherds will be replaced by "the good shepherd." "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David . . ." (Ezekiel 34:23). "I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them" (Ezekiel 34:24). Here the prophet refers to the messianic "Son of David." It is important for us to note that Israel is gathered when the Son of David comes to reign over them. During the present age the messiah came as the messianic prophet. In the age to come he comes and rules as the messianic king.

From these statements by Ezekiel we can understand that Israel/Ephraim is gathered to her land at the end of this age when the messianic king, the Son of David, comes to reign. What follows are promises of blessing for God's people in the restoration (Ezekiel 34:25-31). "They will know that I am the Lord, when I . . . rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them" (Ezekiel 34:27). The theme of the people of God is strengthened by the statement and identification "The house of Israel are my people . . ." (Ezekiel 34:30).

Ezekiel 36 is a message of judgment on the land. God's judgment on Israel was due to her idolatry (Ezekiel 36:7 ff.). The tragedy of idolatry was compounded by Israelites who continued to practice it even in the exile (Ezekiel 36:20).

In all of this they profaned the name of God (Ezekiel 36:20,21). The gathering and restoration would not take place because Israel had reformed, but because of the Name of the Lord (Ezekiel 36:22). The result of this will be that the nations/gentiles would come to know the Lord (Ezekiel 36:23). Again, the Lord repeats his promise: "I will take you (Israel) out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land" (Ezekiel 36:24). God would accomplish the necessary spiritual changes in Israel. He would cleanse her (Ezekiel 36:25). He would give her a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). She would also receive the gift of God's spirit (Ezekiel 36:27). Even the land would be restored (Ezekiel 36:28). Israel's conduct before and during the

exile had been shameful (Ezekiel 36:32), but God would restore both the people Israel and the land (Ezekiel 36:33-38).

In Ezekiel 37 we have the prophet's key passage about the gathering of Israel, the northern kingdom. This prophecy is divided into two visions. In the first vision (Ezekiel 37:1-14) the prophet saw a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1). Following a series of commands by the Lord, the prophet spoke God's word and witnessed the bones come together, become covered with flesh, and then come to life (Ezekiel 37:4-10). The bones in this vision are identified "then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel . . ." (Ezekiel 37:11).

What does the prophecy mean? God gives the answer "Therefore prophesy and say unto them, thus saith the Lord God Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves' (Ezekiel 37:12,13). This is a clear statement about resurrection at the end of the age. Note that Jeremiah also makes the same statement Rachel was weeping for her children "who were not" (they were dead). The Lord admonished her to stop weeping and promised that he would bring them again "from the land of the enemy" (Jeremiah 31:15,16).

The prophet reminds us that God will fulfill His promises. Could this be background for an interpretation of John's Apocalypse in which he saw 144,000, 12,000 of every tribe, stand before the throne (Revelation 7:1-17; 14:1-5)? Much of John's Apocalypse was influenced by or taken from Ezekiel's prophecy. Could John's 144,000 be Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's resurrected "Israel"? Isaiah's prophecy fits in with this picture. Look at Isaiah 11:11. Here, at the end of this age, the Lord sets his hand "the second time" and recovers the remnant of his people from every part of the world, even the islands of the sea. The exiles of both Israel and Judah will be gathered on that day. Following this gathering, God's people will be filled with his spirit (Ezekiel 37:14).

The second vision of Ezekiel 37 involved symbolic actions. The prophet was to take two sticks, each of which represented one of God's two chosen families (Ezekiel 37:16). One stick represented the family of Joseph, who received the birthright (the spiritual leadership), and which was in the hand of Ephraim, the house of Israel (Ezekiel 37:16). The other stick represented the house of Judah from whom came the kingship (Ezekiel 37:16). The two sticks were joined (Ezekiel 37:17).

Again, the Lord gives the meaning of the vision. The stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim (and the tribes of Israel his fellows), is joined with the stick of Judah to become one stick (Ezekiel 37:19) in God's hand. The Lord then speaks of the fulfillment of this prophecy and states that "I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land" (Ezekiel 37:21). They will become one nation (Ezekiel 37:22). Idolatry will cease (Ezekiel 37:23). God will save them and cleanse them (Ezekiel 37:23). David, as messianic king, will rule over them (Ezekiel 37:24), and they will dwell in the promised land, a land promised to Jacob and the other patriarchs (Ezekiel 37:25). God's sanctuary, his tabernacle, will be established in their midst (Ezekiel 37:26,27). The result is that God will be their God and they will be his people (Ezekiel 37:27), to which the heathen will testify (Ezekiel 37:28).

Following his visions of the restored Israel at the end of the age, the prophet Ezekiel moves into the more distant future of "the age to come." His emphasis is the restoration of the true worship of God. His vision is a physical description of the restored temple and the organization of its services as the central place in the coming kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48).

Twice the Lord instructs Ezekiel to share the information about the rebuilt temple with the people of Israel. "Tell the house of Israel everything you see" (Ezekiel 40:4). Again, after describing the return of God's glory (presence) to the temple, Ezekiel is instructed: "Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins. Let them consider the plan, and if they are ashamed of all they have done, make known to them the design of the temple--its arrangement, its exit and entrances--its whole design and all its regulations and laws. Write these down before them so they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations" (Ezekiel 43:10,11).

Apparently this description of the physical temple was intended to encourage Israelites regarding the reality of their *tikvah*, their hope for the fulfillment of the promises of restoration in the age to come.

The prophet describes the glory of God returning to the restored temple. Speaking for God, the prophet states: "This is where I will live among the Israelites forever" (Ezekiel 41:7). This is a theme frequently repeated by the prophets as they describe the restoration of Israel: "I will be their God and they shall be my people," and is presented by Ezekiel as the purpose for the re-gathering and restoration.

Ezekiel makes an interesting suggestion. He views righteous ethical conduct and morality as relevant for the restoration of the natural world to its pristine state as it existed at creation (Ezekiel 45-47). This righteous conduct will include the celebration of the Sabbath (Ezekiel 46:3,4).

It is very clear that when Ezekiel sees the age to come, he sees the existence of Israel, the twelve tribes, as the restored people of God (Ezekiel 47, 48). The land is to be divided according to an inheritance for each tribe. The temple and the city are organized according to the tribes.

How then do the gentile believers share in God's promises? Ezekiel's answer is consistent with the teachings of Moses and the other prophets. The gentiles also are included in the allotment of the inheritances of the land. "'You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,' declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezekiel 47:21-23).

It is important to recognize that Ezekiel's visions of the kingdom come are a fulfillment of God's promises of "seed" and "land" made to Abraham. Furthermore, these promises and their fulfillment include believing gentiles sharing in them with the whole house of Israel.

JOEL

THE PROPHET

Joel was the son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1). We know nothing else about him. Tradition holds that he came from the territory of Reuben. The prophecy suggests that he was from Jerusalem or the surrounding area. There is no evidence regarding when the book was written. A traditional early date is about 835 BCE.

JOEL'S PROPHECY

The prophecy divides naturally into two parts. Joel 1:1 to 2:17 deals with God's judgment: near at hand, and distant. Joel 2:18 to 3:21 declares God's blessing: near at hand, and distant. (The English Bible division of chapters and verses differs from the Hebrew Bible divisions.)

Joel saw a locust plague devastate the land. He saw in this impending "Day of the Lord" a message of judgment at the end of the age. The "Day of the Lord" is a day of judgment for Israelites (Joel 2:1), just as it would be for the nations/gentiles (Joel 3:14; cf. 3:12).

RESTORATION IN JOEL

Joel's prophecy was directed to Judah. Only two brief references were made to Israel. After promising restoration, (Joel 2:25) the prophet declares: "And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else . . ." (Joel 2:27). Then, when the prophet describes the Lord gathering the nations into the valley of Jehoshaphat, he states, "and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land" (Joel 3:2). Joel's references to Israel are only incidental. But he does recognize her place in the gathering and restoration.

JONAH

THE PROPHET

Jonah was a son of Amittai (Jonah 1:1) and may be the same person mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, from Gath-hepher, a village in the region of Lower Galilee east of Nazareth (Joshua 19:13). Rabbinic tradition says that he was the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17 ff.). Jonah was commanded to prophecy in Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). Instead he went to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). After his experience with a great fish he received a second command from *Yahweh* the Lord and went to Nineveh, described as "an exceedingly great city" (Jonah 3:3). Because of the city's repentance, judgment was averted (Jonah 3:10). Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BCE., hence, the story must be dated earlier. There is little in the story to date it. If the Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25 is this prophet, then he carried on his ministry in the days of Jeroboam II (793 to 753 BCE.).

JONAH'S PROPHECY

Jonah's prophecy is divided into two parts. Jonah 1:1 to 2:10 is the disobedience of Jonah and its consequences. Jonah 3:1 to 4:11 is the obedience of Jonah and its consequences. While discussing the story's historicity and credibility many miss the point of the story, which is God's mercy and grace for the gentiles (Jonah 1:2; 4:11). In parabolic interpretation, Israel had a message to give to the gentile nations, but in disobedience had not done so. The message finally got to Nineveh, and the city repented. Jonah was upset. He was more concerned about the destruction of a cucumber vine than about the impending destruction of a city of gentiles (Jonah 4:10,11). The key to the story is Jonah 4:2, which exhibits an exclusiveness completely alien to the original purposes of God's election of Israel as expressed in Genesis 12:3.

RESTORATION IN JONAH

There are no direct statements about the restoration of Israel in Jonah. However, it is implied when considering Jonah's message of God's mercy for the gentiles, as well as for all Israel.

AMOS

THE PROPHET

Amos was a shepherd from the village of Tekoa (Amos 1:1), about six miles south of Bethlehem on the edge of the Judean Wilderness. He was also a "pincher" or "piercer" of sycamore figs (Amos 7:14), a seasonal job in another region. Amos was not a professional prophet, but he was called by *Yahweh* the Lord and sent to the northern capital (Amos 7:12,13). Later, he was asked to leave Bethel (7:12,13). Tradition holds that Amaziah's son killed the prophet by means of a blow to the temple.

THE PROPHECY OF AMOS

Amos is among the earliest of written prophecies. Israel had a covenant relationship with God, and therefore had a special responsibility. Because she ignored this responsibility *Yahweh* the Lord would punish the nation (Amos 3:2,15; 5:27; 7:9; 9:8), and only a remnant will be left (Amos 3:12). The idea of "a remnant" is suggested (Amos 5:3), but not developed. All nations are responsible to *Yahweh* the Lord (Amos 1:1 to 2:8), but Israel was charged with keeping the *Torah of Yahweh* the Law of the Lord (Amos 2:4,6-9). Rather than seeking the Lord's will, she told the prophets to be silent (Amos 2:11,12). She refused to heed the warning the Lord had sent her (Amos 4:8-11). The prophecy may be divided thus: Amos 1:1 to 2:16, judgments on the nations, including Judah and Israel; Amos 3:1 to 6:14, indictment of Israel; Amos 7:1 to 9:10, visions of the coming judgment; Amos 9:11-15, a faint glimmer of hope.

RESTORATION IN AMOS

Yahweh the Lord is creator and sustainer of the universe (Amos 4:13), and is responsible for famine (Amos 4:6), rainfall (Amos 4:7), blight and mildew (Amos 4:8), pestilence (Amos 4:9), and plenty (Amos 9:13). He had redeemed Israel from Egypt (Amos 3:1), and had established a special relationship ("known") with Israel alone (Amos 3:2).

God is judge of the nations (Amos 1:3 to 2:3). The "Day of the Lord" will mean final judgment on all (Amos 5:18-20). But the impending judgment on Israel will prepare her for the final "Day of the Lord." ". . . and I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations . . . yet not the least grain will fall upon the earth" (Amos 9:9). Note that the Lord is merciful. The purpose of his judgments is the redemption of his people. He will also raise up again the fallen booth of David (Amos 9:11), and restore the fortunes of his people (Amos 9:14 ff.). The Lord also speaks of "the gentiles who bear my name" (Amos 9:12).

A solemn warning is given to Israel: "Prepare to meet your *Elohim* God, O Israel" (Amos 4:12). The Lord will confront the nation of Israel (Amos 5:1) because of her sin (Amos 5:2). The Lord also appeals "Seek ye me, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:4,6,14). Note that the house of Israel is also called "the house of Joseph" (Amos 9:9). Restoration would come with the fulfillment of the promise to David (Amos 9:14).

The prophet ends his message with a specific statement of gathering and restoration: "And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon this land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of this land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (Amos 9:14,15. See also Jeremiah 31).

HOSEA

THE PROPHET

Hosea, son of Beeri, was a northerner, maybe from Benjamin and perhaps from the upper class of society. He is the only canonical prophet from the northern kingdom. Chapters 1 to 3 appear to be autobiographical. His personal nature is revealed in the prophecy. He was a man of deep feelings, observant of fine details in the world around him, and tenderhearted in personal relationships. He expressed his feelings in graphic figures of speech. His prophetic ministry took place in the days of Jeroboam II (793 to 753 BCE.), probably not long before the destruction of Jehu's dynasty (753 BCE.). His ministry may have extended into the reign of Hoshea (731 to 722 BCE.), and probably ended before the fall of Samaria (722/721 BCE.).

HOSEA'S PROPHECY

There are two parts to Hosea's prophecy. Hosea 1 to 3 is the prophet's experience in marriage, which is the key to understanding the prophecy. Hosea 4 to 14 is Hosea's prophetic teaching, gathered either by himself or by a disciple. This second section may be subdivided as follows: Hosea 4:1 to 6:3, sin and the need for repentance; Hosea 6:4 to 10:15, punishment must fall on Israel; Hosea 11 to 13, *Yahweh's* love, which yearns for Israel's repentance; Hosea 14, God's mercy to those who repent.

RESTORATION IN HOSEA

It is commonly recognized that in the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures names of individuals frequently have significant meanings. This fact is true in the story of Hosea. The name of the prophet Hosea is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "to deliver" or "set free." It implies being helped or saved. The name of Joshua, the minister of Moses, is also derived from this root word, as is the name Jesus. The wife of Hosea is named Gomer, a name derived from a word which suggests two meanings. The basic meaning is "to bring to an end," or "complete." It was the name of one of the sons of

Japheth and meant "perfection." But when used for the wife of Hosea it implied "to come to an end," or "to fail."

Hosea 1 begins with the story of Gomer and her illegitimate children. Gomer's infidelity portrayed Israel's apostasy in her covenant relationship with God. God named the first child born to Hosea and Gomer *Jezreel* (God sows), "and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hosea 1:4). This name signified God's impending judgment against Israel in which she would be "sown" or scattered among the nations. This naming of a child was parallel to the experience of Isaiah whose sons were named *Mahershalal-hashbaz* and *She'ar-Yashuv*, names implying God's impending judgments and restoration.

Next a daughter was born, but Hosea was not identified as the father. The child is named *Lo-ruhamah* (no mercy), "for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away" (Hosea 1:6). Finally a second son was born, and again Hosea was not identified as the father. The child was named *Lo-ammi* (not my people), "for you are not my people and I will not be your God" (Hosea 1:9).

The message of the names of the last two children of Hosea was that the special covenant relationship between God and Israel had been broken, and therefore God's mercies and promised special blessings would also come to an end. By her actions Israel had completely withdrawn from that special relationship which God had established in the covenant with Abraham and his seed.

Then the prophet looked beyond God's judgments to a time of restoration. "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured . . . Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:10,11). This is a direct reference to the ultimate restoration of both houses of Israel and Judah and their loyalty to the messianic Son of David, their king in the age to come.

The life experiences of Hosea and Gomer in dramatic reality illustrate spiritual adultery, the idolatry of ancient Israel. Again, in true Semitic style, a story is told to make a point. The point of the story of Gomer's adultery is the idolatry of Israel. Similarly, the point of the story of Hosea's faithfulness is God's eternal loving kindness.

As the story is told in chapters 1 to 3, Hosea makes several prophetic statements. The first three verses of chapter two are a promise and prediction of ultimate restoration of Israel. God's

purposes will be fulfilled. Thus, Hosea makes an appeal for repentance as well as pronouncements of judgment which result from Ephraim's idolatry. In fact, idolatry has completely separated Israel from her God. "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband" (Hosea 2:4). One of the tragedies for Israel was that she failed to recognize that the Lord was the One who had blessed her (Hosea 2:10). She had used these material blessings from the Lord for idolatrous purposes. "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols" (Hosea 2:10). As the prophet enumerates God's judgments on Israel, he makes some interesting statements. First is the loss of material blessings (Hosea 2:9,10). Then there is the loss of spiritual blessings. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feasts, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her appointed seasons" (Hosea 2:13). All this is the result of idolatry.

This statement has become prophetic. God removed from Ephraim both material prosperity and the spiritual blessings which had been bestowed in the birthright given by Jacob, and which were to result from faithfulness to *Torah* in the religious expressions of the people. Here is the point at which Israel lost the Sabbath and the Sabbath blessing.

It has been common for some Christian scholars to attribute to the decrees of Rome the establishment of Sunday as the day of worship. But idolatry did not begin with Rome. Any reader of the Bible will recall that it is Babylon which is condemned as being against God. History shows that the idolatry of ancient Israel had its roots in Babylonian pagan religion. Furthermore, the Samaritans who replaced the Israelites in the territories of the northern kingdom adopted, practiced, and promoted Babylonian idolatry (see II Kings 17:22-41). When Rome became an empire, a large segment of the population of Rome were Samaritan in origin, and they practiced idolatry. Some of Rome's emperors and pontiffs were individuals who could trace their ancestries back to Samaritan roots. Even more significant, the sun worship adopted by the Romans had its roots in and was practiced by this "eastern" or "Samaritan" community. A detailed history of this information is cataloged in the book *"The People That History Forgot."*¹¹ From Hosea 2:13, one is led to the conclusion that the spiritual blessing of the Sabbath was taken away from ancient Israel (Ephraim) because of idolatry. Furthermore, Sunday became the mark of idolatrous Roman paganism.

¹¹ Martin, Ernest L., *The People That History Forgot*. Portland: ASK Publications, 1993.

Hosea 2:22 introduces the day when the covenant will be restored between God and his people. "And they shall know *Yahweh* the Lord" (Hosea 2:22-25).

Hosea 3 picks up the story of Gomer's restoration. "So I bought her to me" (Hosea 3:2). If, as we discover from the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah, believing gentiles were added to Ephraim, and Ephraim was reborn when Christianity was re-established at the birth of the Messiah, then what follows is a most dramatic prophecy concerning gentile believers. "I said unto her; thou shalt sit solitary for many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be any man's wife; nor will I be thine" (Hosea 3:3). Again, history verifies that Christianity (believing gentiles who are added to the reborn house of Ephraim) has clung to its idols (see Hosea 4:17).

It is a sad commentary on traditional Christianity, that while claiming to believe in and serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Christian church has more idols and images in her midst than are to be found among pagan Hinduism and Buddhism combined.¹² Gomer (Ephraim/Israel), though bought back, is still idolatrous in her heart and is not yet prepared to make a total commitment to God and a renewal of covenant. The prophet goes on to explain that Israel would exist for many days without the leadership and blessing of the Lord (Hosea 3:4). God would possess them as his people whom he had redeemed, but the blessings of the covenant would be delayed until there was a change of heart. Then, after all of this, *aharit hayamim* in "the end of days" Israel would seek for and turn to the Lord. At that point, the covenant relationship would be fully re-established. Then the words of Ezekiel will ring true: "Hallow my Sabbaths, and they shall be a sign between Me and thee that I am the Lord who sanctified thee" (Ezekiel 20:12,20).

It is important to note that the issue is not which day is the Sabbath. That is already established. The issue is "Who is God?" Is he the Creator who called Abraham to be a blessing to all families of the earth, redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage, made a covenant at Sinai, gave Israel and Judah the land, and brought salvation to all Israel and the gentiles? Or is God the "*Baalim*" of idolatry to which Israel turned when she forgot the Lord her God?

Joshua's statement at Shechem, "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15), is still relevant today. The one who has entered into covenant with the Lord is obligated to celebrate God's commandments as a way of life. *Torah* was never the means

¹² *Ibid.*, pg. 178

for men to reach God. Rather, it is our human response to a loving God who has already reached out to us. *Torah* gives us direction in life. *Torah* is the channel through which the blessings of God's covenant relationship reach his people, who are described as sons and daughters of the living God.

A dominant idea in Hosea's prophecy is *chesed* God's covenant love. Hosea's personal experience illustrates this. God's love is good for his chosen people. God's controversy with Israel was because of her lack of faithfulness (which is paralleled with "knowledge of God" Hosea 4:1). Israel had rejected the obligations of the covenant. God desired relationship, not merely symbolic acts (Hosea 6:6).

Another significant idea in Hosea is the Hebrew word *shuv*, which is translated "turn" or "return." When it has religious significance, it means "repent." Repentance is the result of a knowledge of *Yahweh* the Lord; not knowledge due to new facts--but knowledge due to a new appreciation of the person of *Yahweh* the Lord (Hosea 6:6).

Hosea and Ezekiel were similar in "acting out" prophecy. Hosea's life experience became an object lesson for the house of Israel. The prophet married Gomer, who became unfaithful and bore illegitimate children fathered by her lovers. Finally, abandoning her husband, she sank to the depths of prostitution. One day her husband saw her being auctioned at the slave market, and the Lord instructed Hosea to buy her back. Eventually she again became his wife and he legitimized her children. Israelites understood the prophecy.

The prophet Hosea represented the Lord and his everlasting covenant love. The kingdom of Israel was the unfaithful wife who became an adulteress through idolatry. She would go into captivity. But there would come a day when she would be brought back and restored and her children legitimized. All this is recorded in Hosea 1 to 3.

The prophet also explained this message to be sure that it was understood. The exile would be for a long period of time (Hosea 3:4), but the return would come and the messianic Son of David would rule forever (Hosea 3:3). Note that the influences and results of idolatry would not be eradicated until the final restoration "at the end of days" (Hosea 3:4). Even though Ephraim is "reborn" or "re-established" at the birth of the messiah (cf. Isaiah 66:7,8; Micah 5:1-4), because of his (Ephraim's) love for idolatry he would not yet have God's blessing. We have already implied that the birth of the *netzer* established the *notzrim*, who are added to the reborn Ephraim. That means that gentile Christian believers are joined to or included in the

re-established house of Israel with whom God desires to re-enter into covenant.

Israel, the northern kingdom, is both the subject and object of Hosea's prophetic message. Again, it is the nature of Semitic literature to tell a story to make a point, and that is what we have here. Not only is the story told, but it is acted out graphically over the period of Hosea's lifetime.

By tradition, many Christians are western in their cultural orientation. In their methods for interpreting scripture, they attempt to find a symbolism or interpretation for every detail of a narrative. Semitic thought emphasizes the point of the story. Even though aspects of the story may be illogical or repugnant, that does not detract from the reality of the point being made. With this in mind, we must read the story of Hosea and Gomer to get the point of the story as well as to note features that are historically descriptive or prophetically predictive. The point of this story is the apostasy and idolatry of Israel, the northern kingdom. This same idea and imagery of idolatry as spiritual adultery is presented by Jeremiah in chapters 2 and 3.

Hosea 4 lists the sins of Israel, which were multitudinous (Hosea 4:1,2,6-14). A dramatic summary statement is found in Hosea 4:17: "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." Not only does this summarize the situation, but it also indicates God's response.

Again the prophet warns Israel (Hosea 5:1). Ephraim committed whoredom and defiled Israel (Hosea 5:3). "Israel/Ephraim would fall in her iniquity, Judah also would fall with her" (Hosea 5:5). The Lord would abandon Israel to her evil ways, and this judgment would result in Israel turning back to him (Hosea 5:11-15).

Chapters 6 to 13 describe Ephraim's sins of idolatry. Ephraim would be "among the gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure" (Hosea 8:8). Hosea's prophecy also predicts characteristics of the reborn Ephraim (which includes Christianity) as holding on to his idolatry. Note Hosea 8:1. Ephraim has "transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my *Torah*." Where could one find a clearer picture of the tendency among many Christians to regard the commandments as obsolete, or the *Torah* as out-dated and irrelevant? How does Ephraim act in his religious zeal? He proclaims his loyalty and commitment to the Lord: "Israel cries out, my God, we know Thee" (Hosea 8:2). But the truth of the matter is that "Israel has cast off (rejected) that which was good" (Hosea 8:3). Furthermore, the multiplication of altars only compounded the sins of idolatry (Hosea 8:11). The result was the captivity which Hosea

described as "Israel is swallowed up, now she is among the *goyim* nations/gentiles like a worthless thing." (Hosea 8:8).

Next Hosea describes the root of idolatry as found in Ephraim. "Though I (God) wrote for him (Ephraim) ever so many things of my *Torah*, they are accounted (regarded) as a stranger's (rejected)" (Hosea 8:12). This is a picture of the reborn Ephraim's and the Christian's claim to be "believers," while at the same time rejecting the *Torah* as antiquated and outdated, Jewish, or irrelevant. This is especially true with the fourth commandment of the Decalogue which states that the seventh day is the Sabbath. Many Christians today claim to accept and live by the Ten Commandments, yet they reject the Sabbath. History clearly shows that Sunday observance has its roots in paganism. In the Hebrew Holy Scriptures there is no commandment by Moses, the prophets, priest, or king, declaring that the Sabbath is to be observed on Sunday or any day of the week other than on the seventh day. Similarly, in the New Testament, there is no command by Jesus, the disciples, or the apostles to observe any day other than the seventh day as the Sabbath.

A clergyman friend once remarked, "Sunday is my Sabbath." He was absolutely correct. It was "his Sabbath." But, according to Holy Scripture, the seventh day is "the Sabbath of the Lord your God!"

"Jesus, as his custom was, went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day" (Luke 4:16). We must remember that Jesus did not attend a church, nor was he ever a Christian. He was Jewish and worshiped in the Jewish way. Furthermore, Isaiah points out that in the coming Kingdom of God "from Sabbath to Sabbath shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 66:23). The Sabbath is "the Sabbath of the Lord thy God" and is not a man-made institution subject to the manipulations and decrees of men. It was God's intention that the Sabbath was to be a blessing to humanity. But Ephraim, because of his idolatry, would go back into a period of captivity and slavery as symbolized by Egyptian bondage (Hosea 8:13; 9:3). All of this suffering and loss of blessing were the results of what Israel had done to herself (Hosea 13:9) through idolatry.

The prophet includes a statement about gathering through resurrection. "I will ransom you from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction . . ." (Hosea 13:14. See also Jeremiah 31:15-17; and Ezekiel 37:11-13).

Chapter 14 finally appeals to Israel to return to the Lord. Promises of prosperity are given. The prophet declares that Ephraim will finally abandon idolatry (Hosea 14:8).

Hosea's statements emphasizing idolatry may seem repetitious, but he is attempting to focus our attention on the real issue for God's people. He appeals for repentance and a complete return to covenant love in which our motives as well as our actions proclaim our loyalty to God. This is what God is attempting to do for Ephraim in "the last days."

"Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips . . . We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made . . ." (Hosea 14:1-3).

MICAH

THE PROPHET

Micah was a prophet from Moresheth (Micah 1:1), probably, Moresheth-Gath in the Shephelah about twenty miles south-west of Jerusalem. He most likely was a humble commoner and does not even record his father's name. We have no other information about the prophet.

MICAH'S PROPHECY

Micah's prophecy was the word of *Yahweh* the Lord which he "saw" concerning Samaria and Jerusalem, the capitals of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. There are three parts to the prophecy, each introduced by the word "hear." Micah 1:1 to 3:12 is a denunciation of sins, and prophecy of the resultant punishment. Micah 4:1 to 5:15 declares the hope of the messianic kingdom. Micah 6:1 to 7:20 foretells punishment and final mercy. Again, each part has three sections: reproof, threat, and promise. A century later Jeremiah repeated Micah's words (Jeremiah 26:18,19). Micah was a contemporary of Amos and Isaiah, and they may have read each other's prophecies.

Micah's attacks were levied against the religious leaders (Micah 2:11), the rulers (Micah 3:1-4), the false prophets (Micah 3:5-8), and the entire nation. His declaration of judgment does not seem to include any repentance which would cause God to change the verdict (Micah 1:9). Religion or cult was not the answer. Only the practice of God's *Torah* was acceptable (Micah 6:6-8).

The bulk of Micah's message was addressed to Judah, but Israel was also included. After rebuking the false prophets (Micah 2:11) and the leaders (Micah 3:1-12), Micah turns his attention to *aharit hayamim*, the last days (Micah 4:1). For him this is a time of restoration. The geographic center of the restoration will be Jerusalem. The house of God, the temple, will be the heart of Jerusalem. The central people are Israel whom *Yahweh* the Lord has exalted as his remnant (Micah 4:6,7). The *goyim* nations/gentiles also are included in the glory of the messianic age (Micah 4:2). There will be peace among nations (Micah 4:3,4), which results from the practice of *Torah* (Micah 4:2) and the sovereign activity of

Yahweh the Lord himself (Micah 4:3,7; 5:2-4). Human efforts to secure peace through false religion or force will come to an end (Micah 5:10-14).

RESTORATION IN MICAH

Micah is the prophet who not only tells about the impending judgment and captivity of Israel and Judah, but also reveals clearly how the restoration of each will be accomplished. His are among the plainest statements in all of Scripture and cannot be ignored if one hopes to understand God's plan for his people.

As for the house of Judah, Micah declared: "You will go to Babylon, there you will be rescued" (Micah 4:10). This was a straightforward statement which history has corroborated.

As for the house of Israel, Micah gives more detail which answers the question of how God's promises of restoration made to Israel (Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim) would be fulfilled. Micah's statement also deals with the question of whether the ten northern tribes were lost, or not. Note carefully Micah 5:2-5 (NIV). Verse 2: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small (least) among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Verse 3: "Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and then the rest of his brothers will return to join the Israelites." Verse 4: "He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth." Verse 5: "And he will be their peace."

Bethlehem Ephrathah is a reference to the town of Bethlehem in the hill country of Judah, which was a possession of Ephraim (a northern tribe) because grandmother Rachel was buried there (Micah 5:2. See also Ruth). The word "small" also can be translated "youngest." Ephraim was the younger son of Joseph. The other tribe of Joseph was named after Manasseh, Ephraim's older brother. The rest of the tribes were named after Joseph's brothers, Ephraim's uncles. Ephraim was the youngest (least) among the tribes.

The one who was to be ruler in all Israel was to come from Bethlehem. This is first a reference to the messianic person being a descendant of the lineage of David. Second, it points to the village of Bethlehem as the place where the messiah was to appear. This Son

of David is also identified as "the Lord," the one who is called "the Ancient of Days."¹³

Now note Micah 5:3: "Therefore Israel will be abandoned." This is a specific reference to the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722/721 BCE., and the captivity and dispersion of her people. Next the prophet tells us precisely how long the captivity would last, and identifies the event which would mark the re-establishment of the "house of Israel," the rebirth of Ephraim. ". . . until the time when she who is in labor gives birth." This is a direct prediction of, and reference to, Mary giving birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. ". . . and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites." The "rest of his brothers" is a reference to the ten scattered tribes of the northern kingdom, the scattered people of Ephraim.

Micah is telling us that at the moment when Jesus, the *netzer* of Isaiah 11:1 was born in Bethlehem, Ephraim was reborn and, therefore, all twelve tribes were re-established (also see Isaiah 66:7,8). If Jesus is the messiah, then he must re-establish all twelve tribes. Micah is telling us very clearly how the northern tribes of Jacob/Ephraim would be re-established or restored. The birth of the *netzer* signals the rebirth or re-establishment of Ephraim. Another implication of this statement is that if the *netzer* established the *notzrim*, then the *notzrim* (believing gentiles/Christians) are joined to the reborn Ephraim through the *mishpat banim*, the law of sonship (adoption). Here is the biblical basis for reconciliation between Christians and Jews. Both families, Judah and Ephraim, belong to God. In his providence he ultimately will make them "one people" at the end of this age when the messianic Son of David comes to reign (Ezekiel 37:15 ff.).

Micah 5:4,5 point out the messianic role of the one born in Bethlehem who "stands in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." His greatness would reach to the ends of the earth. Only Jesus, born of a virgin in Bethlehem of Judea (Isaiah 7:14), ever fulfilled all the details of this prophecy. In summarizing his ministry Jesus stated: "Father, I have revealed you" (John 17). The Gospel or Good News of Jesus as messiah has spread to every corner of the globe. The Holy Scriptures of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings, have testified of his coming. The Koran declares Jesus to be the only perfect one who ever lived and teaches

¹³ The prayer for the *Shachrit* and *Musaf* services also includes this concept of the Lord being the messiah: ". . . And he will be your God." *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, *loc. cit.*

that he will come again at the end of this age to rule in righteousness. Christians are not alone in recognizing the uniqueness of the ministry of Jesus.

"And he will be their peace." This is a magnificent statement. It implies a complete restoration of the people of God. It also declares that a right relationship between God and his people is restored through this messianic person. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians picks up this statement and repeats it: "For he is our peace" (Ephesians 2:13,14).

The remnant of Jacob is told that they would "be in the midst of many peoples" (Micah 5:7), "scattered among many nations" (Micah 5:8). The purpose of the captivity was to destroy idolatry in Israel (Micah 5:12-14). Israel would rise again (Micah 7:8). The prophet wrote that the Lord would redeem his people and bring them back (Micah 7:9-12). Those (gentiles) who witness this "will turn in fear to the Lord our God" (Micah 7:18). God will have compassion on the remnant (Micah 7:18,19). Finally, the prophet expresses confidence in the promises made to the patriarchs (Micah 7:20) and sees their fulfillment in light of what the Lord has proclaimed.

OBADIAH

THE PROPHET

Obadiah came from Judah. Nothing more is known. There is a Jewish tradition (Sanhedrin 39b) that he was a steward of King Ahab, or a captain of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:13-15) from the region of Shechem. The tradition says he was saved from death by Elijah, whose pupil he was, and that he left the king's service to become a prophet. There is no factual basis for any of this.

OBADIAH'S PROPHECY

The prophecy contains only twenty-one verses. Obadiah 1 to 9 pronounces judgment against Edom. Obadiah 10-14 lists the sins of Edom, reasons for the judgment, and a warning. Obadiah 15-19 mentions the Day of the Lord and judgment on the nations. Obadiah 20, 21 is an epilogue telling about the victorious kingdom. Jeremiah quotes from this prophecy--Obadiah 1 to 10 are repeated in Jeremiah 49:7-22.

RESTORATION IN OBADIAH

Edom was condemned because of violence against Jacob (Obadiah 10). She did nothing to help (Obadiah 11,12). But Jacob's fortunes would change; restoration would come (Obadiah 17). The "house of Jacob," also called "the house of Joseph," would ultimately destroy Edom (Obadiah 18). They would also occupy its territory as well as the Negev, Philistia, Ephraim, Samaria, and Gilead (Obadiah 19). The restoration meant that justice would prevail and ultimately the kingdom would be the Lord's (Obadiah 21).

ZEPHANIAH

THE PROPHET

Zephaniah was a son of Cushi (Zephaniah 1:1), who traced his genealogy back five generations to Hezekiah, possibly the king of Judah (728 to 687 BCE.). Zephaniah probably was born between 661 and 641 BCE. His prophecy is dated "in the days of Josiah," who reigned 639 to 609 BCE.

ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECY

The prophecy consists of three chapters concerning the "Day of the Lord." The main burden is judgment on Judah and the surrounding nations, but it ends with a note of hope (Zephaniah 3:9-20).

RESTORATION IN ZEPHANIAH

The Lord pleads with Judah to repent and turn back to him. (Zephaniah 2:1-7). The Lord identifies himself as "the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel," which must refer to all twelve tribes (Zephaniah 2:9). Zephaniah remembers that God's people had been scattered, so he makes reference to this in his promise of return. "From beyond the rivers of Cush, my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings" (Zephaniah 3:10). The Lord promises to "turn away their captivity" (Zephaniah 2:7) and then describes the blessings which will come (Zephaniah 3:8-13) for the remnant of Israel (Zephaniah 3:13), another reference to all twelve tribes. The result is rejoicing for Israel because the king of Israel reigns (Zephaniah 3:14,15). Finally the prophet reminds God's people that there will be a time when God will gather his people (Zephaniah 3:20).

HAGGAI

The prophet is named (Haggai 1:1; Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Nothing else is known of him. With the death of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the prophetic period closed and the gift of prophecy was silent for four hundred years, until the coming of John the Baptist.

During these four centuries rabbinic Judaism took root, as did the ideas which blossomed into the writings and teachings of the New Testament.

The prophecy of Haggai was directed to Judah and had to do with the rebuilding of the temple following the return from exile. No references are made to the gentiles, Israel, or the restoration of Israel. But the prophet makes a beautiful statement about the coming of the messiah. Haggai 2:7-9 records two promises: "The desire of all nations shall come," and "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former house." Here are promises that the messiah will come, and that he will stand in the temple. His presence will bring the glory of God to this house. Because the second temple was destroyed in 70 CE., the messiah must have come before then and stood in its precincts.

ZECHARIAH

THE PROPHET

Zechariah is identified as a son of Berechiah (Zechariah 1:1), or a son of Iddo (Ezra 5:1; 6:14): "ben Iddo" could also mean grandson of Iddo. Iddo was among the heads of the priestly families who returned from exile (Nehemiah 12:4), and Zechariah is possibly numbered among the priests (Nehemiah 12:16). Zechariah is a common name; 32 persons of that name are listed in the Bible Dictionary.

Zechariah was associated with Haggai in an effort to get the temple rebuilt (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). We can assume he was a young man (Zechariah 2:4) where the word *na'ar* "youth" is used of him. It is possible to date the prophecy. Zechariah 1:1 would be October/November of 520 BCE.; Zechariah 7:1 would be December 7, 518 BCE. These were times of political turmoil and social change which should be studied to understand the setting for this prophecy.

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY

The prophecy can be divided into two parts. Dated prophecies are found in Zechariah 1 through 8, largely in the form of visions. Zechariah 9 through 14 contain no dated prophecies, no night visions, and exhibit a markedly different style.

Zechariah 1:1-6 is an opening call to repentance. It is followed by eight night visions dated 24/XI/YRD. 2¹⁴ which is March 16, 519 BCE. (Zechariah 1:7). The visions are: 1. The four horsemen; a promise of restoration (Zechariah 1:8-17). 2. Four horns and four craftsmen, judgment on the nations (Zechariah 1:18-21/MT¹⁵ 2:1-4). 3. The man with the measuring line, rebuilding of Jerusalem (Zechariah 2:1-13/MT 2:5-17). 4. Joshua and Satan, promises of "my servant the Branch" (Zechariah 3:1-10). 5. The golden lamp stand and the two olive trees, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zechariah 4:1-14). 6. The flying scroll, the curse over the earth (Zechariah 5:1-4). 7. The woman with the ephah,

¹⁴ YRD = Year of Darius.

¹⁵ MT = Masoretic Hebrew Text.

wickedness (Zechariah 5:5-11). 8. The four chariots and their horses, patrolling the earth (Zechariah 6:1-8).

Then follows the crowning of *Yehoshua* "Joshua," the "Branch," who was to build the temple (Zechariah 6:9-15). Chapter 7 discusses the real reason for fasting and is dated 4/IX/YRD. 4, which is December 7, 518 BCE. Chapter 8 presents the results of *Yahweh's* the Lord's promise, the return to Jerusalem, the sowing of peace and prosperity, and the ultimate blessing of all men.

Chapters 9 to 14 may also be divided into two parts: Chapters 9 to 11 open with an oracle against the Arameans (Syria), Phoenicians, and Philistines (Zechariah 9:1-12). Then follows a prophecy of the coming of the victorious king, generally interpreted as the messianic king, and of the results of his coming (Zechariah 9:9-17). The people wander without a shepherd and are gathered in a second exodus (Zechariah 10:1-12). Good and foolish shepherds are discussed, and the worthless are judged (Zechariah 11). Zechariah 12 through 14 are apocalyptic and eschatological and deal with judgment, final restoration and gathering.

RESTORATION IN ZECHARIAH

Zechariah is one of the most "messianic" of the prophets. Much of his prophecy is predictive. He speaks of the scattering of Judah, Jerusalem, and Israel (Zechariah 1:19). But he also predicts the final restoration and speaks of "many *goyim* nations/gentiles being joined to the Lord" (Zechariah 2:15). Obviously, this is more than the twelve tribes and includes believing gentiles. Statements made by Zechariah in these verses are probably the clearest and most explicit in all Scripture regarding God's intentions for the gentiles. "Many *goyim* nations/gentiles will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you" (verse 15). "The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem" (verse 16). "Be still before the Lord, all mankind, . . ." (verse 17). Here are gentiles who turn to the Lord and believe in him. They are accepted by him and become "my people" along with Israel, the covenant people of God.

In chapter 6:12 the prophet re-introduces us to the messianic person called "the Branch." In Zechariah 6:13 he goes on to inform us of the activities and roles of the messiah which should enable us to identify him. First, "he will build the temple of the Lord." Second, "he will bear the glory." Then "he shall sit and rule upon his throne"

(the messianic Son of David, cf. 2 Samuel 7). Furthermore, "there shall be a priest upon his throne." Is this a reference to the messianic prophet predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, who is also the one who holds the birthright (spiritual leadership) by virtue of his descent from Ephraim?

At this point we must pay close attention to the Hebrew text which is very precise. Here it speaks of a messianic person who fulfills two roles. The Hebrew text states *`al kis'ao* "upon his throne." Bible translators had difficulty with this text because they thought that it meant two different people, and so they translated the kingly ruler as "sitting upon his throne" and the priest as "standing before the throne." Any reader of Hebrew will have to admit that both the king and the priest are upon the throne. This is a reference to the same individual fulfilling two roles rather than a description of two separate individuals. There is only one "Branch," one messiah. It is a reference to the two roles of the messiah. This is what Zechariah is describing. It is in this dual role that the messiah, "the Branch," accomplishes "the counsel of peace" (Zechariah 6:12,13). Paul picked up the imagery of these messianic roles when he declared "and he himself is our *shalem* peace" (Ephesians 2:14). This word *shalem* is derived from the Hebrew word *shalom* and implies both peace and completion. So it is in the dual roles of spiritual leader and kingly ruler that the messiah accomplishes the completion of his plans for the redemption and restoration of his people, all of whom were created in his image.

Both houses of Judah and Israel are promised that God will save them (Zechariah 8:13-15). God's will and plan will be accomplished by God's servant, "the Branch." Obviously this is a reference to the messiah. "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God'" (Zechariah 8:7,8). "Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and entreat him" (Zechariah 8:22).

No one can deny that God's plan includes believing gentiles in the family of Israel as recipients of his promises and blessings. When the nations finally seek God it will include "all Israel" (Zechariah 9:1). The coming king will bring changes in Jerusalem (Judah) and Ephraim (Israel), who will turn to righteousness (Zechariah 9:1-13).

Zechariah provides additional insights into the person of the messiah. Again he speaks of the image of the messianic king: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout O daughter of Jerusalem;

behold, thy king cometh unto thee, he is triumphant, and victorious, lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9:9). For a fulfillment of this prophecy, we read in Matthew's gospel, 21:1-11, of Jesus entering into Jerusalem, riding upon the colt of an ass. The people cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David!" an obvious reference to the prophesied messianic king. Zechariah continues to describe this messianic person. "And he shall speak *shalom* peace to the *goyim* nations/gentiles" (Zechariah 9:10). How effective is his message of peace? "And his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). We must note that the messiah is not only for Judah or Israel, but his salvation and dominion are universal and reach to all nations. This is a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that in him (in his seed) all families/nations of the earth would be blessed (cf. Genesis 12:2,3).

Finally, Zechariah makes reference to "sacrifice." He states that by virtue of the "blood of thy covenant prisoners are freed from the pit" (Zechariah 9:11). Here we have a prophetic prediction of a blood sacrifice by the messianic person (crucifixion), by means of which repentant men and women are rescued, redeemed, and ultimately resurrected from the pit (grave). Zechariah ends chapter 9 by emphasizing God's persistence in bringing victory to his people. He predicts features of the messianic blessing for God's people: "Return to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope; even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee. For I bend Judah for me, I fill the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up thy sons, O Zion . . ." (Zechariah 9:12,13).

God's mercy for both the houses of Judah and Joseph is promised, and includes saving them and restoring them to their former covenant relationship with him (Zechariah 10:6-8). The prophet speaks of the people of Ephraim being scattered among the people of far countries. They remember God and turn to him (Zechariah 10:8-10). Here the prophet focuses upon the final gathering and restoration of God's people, which include Judah, Ephraim, and the *goyim* nations/gentiles. "I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph (Ephraim), and I will restore them because I have compassion on them: and they shall be as though I had not rejected them: for I am *Yahweh* the Lord their God, and will hear them. The Ephraimites will become like mighty men, and their hearts will be glad as with wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord" (Zechariah 10:6,7). Ephraim will be multiplied during his captivity

among the nations where he was scattered. There he would remember the Lord (Zechariah 9:8,9).

Among the numerous predictions Zechariah makes about the messianic person is one which helps us make an accurate identification. He states that thirty pieces of silver was the value Israel and Judah would place upon the Lord (the Holy One of Israel, your Savior). Furthermore, these thirty pieces of silver would be cast into the treasury in the house of the Lord (Zechariah 11:12,13). Read Matthew 27:1-9 to see how every detail of this prediction was fulfilled in the betrayal and trial of Jesus of Nazareth.

Zechariah predicts the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah. When the messiah comes at the end of the age, then Judah and the house of David will have their eyes opened and "they shall look upon me whom they have thrust through (crucifixion), and they shall mourn for him (repentance) as one mourneth for his *yahid* only/unique son, for his *becor* first-born son (Zechariah 12:10,11). This prophetic passage plainly declares that the messiah brings salvation to Judah. There are Christians who teach that Jewish people must become "gentiles," rejecting their Judaism, to be believers in God, to be accepted by God, or to recognize that *Yeshua* Jesus was the promised messiah. These attitudes are both prejudicial and unbiblical. Jewish people who believe that Jesus was the messiah are never gentiles or Christians. They remain Jewish and worship in the Jewish way.

Blessing results from all the sad events of judgment. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for purification and for sprinkling. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered . . ." (Zechariah 13:1,2). Idolatry is a common human spiritual malady, a spiritual sickness, which the Lord must heal and remove from his people. People cannot cure themselves or rid themselves of this curse. The eradication of idolatry opens the way for a covenant relationship to be re-established between God and his people.

In the remainder of Zechariah 13, the prophet speaks of the rejection of the messianic prophet. Finally he points out that the messianic prophet has wounds in his hands--"those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). The restoration results in God's acceptance of the people and their total commitment to him. ". . . I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'the Lord is our God'" (Zechariah 13:9).

Zechariah chapter 14 has been difficult for biblical scholars to interpret. The difficulty lies in finding correlation between Zechariah's statements and those of other prophets. Also, there is difficulty in assigning predicted events to a particular time frame. It is obvious that in his vision Zechariah is describing events in his future, as well as at the end of the age. A new age is ushered in and Jerusalem becomes secure. It is difficult to put Zechariah's descriptions into chronological order. Probably we would do well to follow the advice of Jesus: "When you see all these things come to pass, then know . . ."(Matthew 24:33). Obviously the prophet Zechariah believed in the coming of the messiah as a prophet/priest, as well as a coming age at the end of days in which the Son of David would rule as messianic king.

MALACHI

THE PROPHET

Malachi is the name of the prophet (Malachi 1:1), but this name could also be a title meaning "my messenger." In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), the name is rendered as "his angel/messenger." A Jewish tradition suggests that Ezra was the author. It may be that we have lost the name of "the messenger."

MALACHI'S PROPHECY

Malachi's prophecy reaffirms God's love (Malachi 1:2). He is a father (Malachi 1:6), the father of all (Malachi 2:10). He does not change (Malachi 3:6). His word is still true, "return to me, and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:7). He is coming, and will send his messenger to prepare the way (Malachi 3:1). Those who fear the Lord will be his special possession on the day he acts (Malachi 3:16,17). The day is coming, and it will be like a burning oven; but for those who fear his name, it will be a sun of righteousness with healing in its wings (Malachi 4:2). Remember the *Torah* Law of Moses (Malachi 4:4). Elijah, the great example of the prophet, will come before the "Day of *Yahweh*" the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers (Malachi 4:5,6).

The message of Malachi clearly says "unfinished," God still has a work to complete. The exile was not the end. *Yahweh* the Lord had not yet had his day. But he will come. This prophecy is a fitting close to the prophetic period. The prophetic word would be replaced by the Incarnate Word. The *Torah* (Law) on stone would be replaced by the *Torah* (Law) in the heart. The old temple and its ritual would be replaced by worship which is true and spiritual.

RESTORATION IN MALACHI

The prophecy is directed "to Israel" (Malachi 1:1). *Yahweh* the Lord has loved Jacob with an everlasting love (Malachi 1:2). The time will come when *Yahweh* the Lord again will be magnified from the borders of the land (Malachi 1:5). God's name also will become great among the *goyim* nations/gentiles (Malachi 1:11). Israel and Judah had profaned God's name before the nations by offering unacceptable worship and sacrifice (Malachi 1:12 2:17). Fortunately for Israel, God is faithful to his covenant (Malachi 2:16). The "messenger of *Yahweh* the Lord" (the messiah) will bring reformation (Malachi 3:1).

Finally, the *Tanakh* closes with a summary appeal from *Yahweh* the Lord. "Remember the *Torah* of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See I send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,5)

The reason the sons of Jacob have survived is due to God's faithfulness to his covenant (Malachi 3:6). God's last warning before the final judgment will be given by "Elijah" who will bring reformation to God's people and prepare them for his coming by re-emphasizing to them the *Torah* of Moses (Malachi 4:5).

A SUMMARY OF PROPHETIC TEACHING ON EPHRAIM

Having studied the teachings about Joseph/Ephraim in the Holy Scriptures, two main issues come into focus. The first issue is idolatry, which has to do with the relationship between man and God. The second issue is brotherhood, and has to do with human relationships.

IDOLATRY

The Bible story is replete with examples of idolatry. Abraham, the great father of our faith who stood at the beginning of salvation history, is said to have come from a family which practiced idolatry. "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods'" (Joshua 24:2). Two generations later, Rachel, the wife of Jacob, stole her family's gods (Genesis 31:19 ff.). There can be no question that these were idol images.

The planting of sacred groves (i.e. Genesis 21:33) and pouring drink offerings over *mazzabot* standing stones (Joshua 24:25, 26) have their parallels in ancient Near Eastern pagan cult practices.

During the period of Egyptian bondage, Israelites became subject to the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12). As they wandered through the Sinai during the Exodus experience, Israel fell into idolatry when they made a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-6) which was intended to be a representation of *Yahweh* the Lord (Exodus 32:4). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram offered strange fire before the Lord, an act which cost them their lives (Numbers 16:1-35).

Solomon brought idolatry into Israel when he took foreign wives and concubines, and allowed them to build shrines for the worship of their pagan gods. Jereboam opposed Rehoboam, successor to Solomon, and led in the break-away of ten tribes to form the northern confederacy. He is remembered for setting up a golden calf at Dan and at Bethel as substitutes for the worship of *Yahweh* the Lord at Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28, 29). The ultimate blasphemy came when Manasseh erected an idol statue in the Most Holy Place of the temple (2 Kings 21:7) and offered his child as a burnt sacrifice to Moloch (2 Kings 21:6).

Idolatry was the sin of Israel, the northern kingdom. The prophets of Israel preached against idolatry, and warned about its results. Because of her idolatry, Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians. A century later, Judah (the southern kingdom) who had failed to learn from the experiences of Israel (the northern kingdom) was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Again, the issue was idolatry.

The captivities were not the final destruction of God's people. Rather, these judgments from God were intended to be corrective and redemptive. The messages of the prophets are clear that all Israel will be saved. She will be re-gathered at the end of the age and fully restored in the age to come.

Repentance is the first step in the process of restoration. It is not the result of human effort. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). God gives repentance. He cleanses his people of sin (Jeremiah 31:34; 33:8). He gives a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). He completely reshapes the life as a potter does the clay (Jeremiah 18:5-10).

These great redemptive acts of God are for all men and women everywhere. His election of Israel and his promises of blessing will be fulfilled at the end of this age and in the age to come. Idolatry will be completely eradicated, and a right relationship re-established between God and his people. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33; 30:22).

BROTHERHOOD

The issue of brotherhood is dependent upon a right relationship with God. Unless our hearts and lives first are right with God, we cannot be reconciled to each other.

The teaching about Ephraim in the prophetic writings of ancient Israel must be summarized as background for studying and understanding New Testament teachings about Israel, Judah, and the gentiles.

Over the centuries, relationships between Christians and Jews have been characterized by *sinas chinum* (unwarranted hatred). We should ask ourselves if this situation is the result of the teachings of biblical Judaism or biblical Christianity. Did early Christians reject the Holy Scriptures of Judaism and its teachings? Certainly not. The first Christians were Jewish in their lifestyle and faith. They did not think of themselves as beginning a new religion. They considered

their expressions of faith a return to the biblical teachings of Moses and the prophets and a rejection of the *gezerot* laws of rabbinic Judaism, which had come to dominate Judaism in the second temple period. Because of the political and religious corruption of the times, as evidenced by secular records such as those found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, early Christians (*notzrei brit*) tended, along with other religious movements, to be apocalyptic in their approach to understanding the prophets and contemporary times. Many believed themselves to be near the end of this age and on the verge of the messianic age to come. The teachings of Jesus were in the traditions of Moses. The teachings of Paul were in the traditions of the prophets, and he possibly viewed his missionary activities among the gentiles as a fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and the fathers regarding the inclusion of the gentiles.

The teachings of both Jesus and Paul shaped the thinking of early Christians about the relationship between gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, and also had a bearing on the relationship between Christians and Jews. We must remember that Paul was a rabbi who had been taught by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), one of the great rabbis of his day. Paul's teachings regarding the gentiles were based upon his understanding of Ephraim as presented in the prophetic literature (cf. "this mystery of God" in Ephesians 2 and 3). Therefore, we must review these teachings.

Salvation history began when God called a man--Abraham. The call and the promise included a blessing for the nations/gentiles. The blessing of Abraham was to come to the gentiles through Ephraim, whom Jacob predicted to become a multitude of *goyim* nations/gentiles (Genesis 48:19). After the division of the nation of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms, all the prophets spoke of two houses, the house of Israel/Ephraim (the northern kingdom), and the house of Judah (the southern kingdom). Because of idolatry, both kingdoms went into captivity. First the northern kingdom (Jacob-Israel-Joseph-Ephraim-Samaria) was taken into captivity in 722/721 BCE. by the Assyrians. Then the southern kingdom (Judah) was conquered in 597 BCE. and taken into captivity in 586 BCE. by the Babylonians.

Judah remained in exile for 70 years and then returned as a group. Because the northern kingdom did not "return" in the same way, it came to be referred to as "the ten lost tribes." Are they lost? To answer this question we begin with God's purpose for Israel in captivity as explained by the prophets. Jeremiah makes it plain that the Lord will accomplish his purpose in the judgment against Israel (Jeremiah 30:24). First, the Lord desired to reform his people

(Jeremiah 15:19; 25; 50:20) and to remove idolatry from their midst (Micah 5:12-14). They needed to see that immoral, unethical, and sinful ways of living resulted in death and destruction (Jeremiah 32). Second, the Lord used this as an opportunity to bring a knowledge of God to the *goyim* nations/gentiles (Jeremiah 16:19-21; Ezekiel 36:23). This knowledge of God would result in the *goyim* nations/gentiles turning to him in faith and belief (Jeremiah 16:19-21; Micah 7:18).

These gentile believers would be established by the *netzer* (shoot, preserver) who was to come out of the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). The messianic *netzer* established the *notzrim* (believing gentiles/ Christians), who have been united with the "re-established Ephraim" (the House of Israel Micah 5:2,3; Isaiah 66:7,8) through *mishpat banim* adoption. If Jesus did not re-establish all twelve tribes, then he was not the messiah. The birthright belonged to Ephraim, and the blessing of Abraham for the *goyim* nations/gentiles was to come through Ephraim. This is how it happened: gentiles who believed in God (as Abraham believed in God) would have righteousness accounted to them--thus the story of Ruth in which she, a gentile, was added to the Ephrathite family of Naomi. Later Ruth married Boaz, a descendant of Judah. Their son was Obed, grandfather of David, to whom the Lord promised "an eternal son of David who would sit on an eternal throne" (2 Samuel 7), the messianic king who has the right to rule all mankind.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that aliens would be added to Jacob (Isaiah 14:1,2) or Ephraim, who represented the northern kingdom by virtue of his birthright, and who was re-established when Jesus, the messiah, was born (Micah 5:2-5). Gentiles who believe in *Yahweh* the Lord, the God of Israel, are added to Ephraim.

It is important to recognize the identity of New Testament Ephraim. Some Christians who have studied the topic of Ephraim have mistakenly believed that the gentile Christian church has "replaced" ancient Israel as the "new Ephraim." That is incorrect. There is no "replacement theory" in all of scripture in which Judah or Ephraim (Israel) are rejected by God or replaced by Christian believers. Remember that believing gentiles are "added to" Ephraim. In Hebrew the expression is *mishpat baniym*, "the law of sonship." Paul, in New Testament Greek, used the expression *huiiothesia* (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). It is translated "adopted" and refers to believing gentiles who are "added to" Ephraim/Israel and have the full status of "sons and daughters" of God. Literally, the believing gentile becomes a "son" or "daughter" of God (I John 3:2) with full rights of inheritance. Gentile believers

share in the promises that God made to Israel. Israel must exist if gentile Christian believers are to receive the fulfillment of any of the promises of God.

The concept of being "added to" Ephraim implies the existence of Israel/Ephraim. The Assyrian conquest and captivity of Ephraim/Israel in 722/721 BCE. scattered the members of the northern kingdom among the nations. Today we cannot identify a particular person as a member of a specific tribe. We refer to all descendants of Jacob as "Jews." Because of this, Christian and Jewish people have spoken about the "ten lost tribes." But, in light of prophetic statements about the gathering and restoration of Israel/Ephraim in "the last days," we are forced to the conclusion that even though we do not know the identity of the remnant or descendants of the ten tribes, God knows. In God's plan, according to the prophets, believing gentiles are counted with the remnant of Ephraim. Ephraim will be "gathered" and "restored" in the last days (Isaiah 11:10), and will serve God in the kingdom to come.

All this means that descendants of the northern ten tribes, identified as the re-established Ephraim, today are scattered among the gentile nations, and added to them are believing gentile Christians (Galatians 3:7-9, 26, 29). This is the biblical picture of Ephraim in *aharit hayamim*, the "end of days."

The prophets emphasized a *Torah* Judaism, and the New Testament teaches a biblical Christianity. Among Jewish people today can be found those who espouse rabbinic Judaism to the extent that Moses and the prophets are merely subjects for discussion but have no authority. The same applies to Christian groups who have espoused traditions (some of which are of pagan origin) to the extent that Scripture no longer has authority, but is subject to traditions or men's judgments.

It is hoped that the readers of this volume will sense the importance of a return to *Torah* Judaism or biblical Christianity. This is an appeal to do so. "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:7; cf. 2 Chronicles 30:9; Jeremiah 24:7). "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. . ." (Psalm 24:3, 4). The prophets considered anything less than total commitment a form of idolatry. God's promises are for those who believe him and rest in his word.

All the prophets speak of a "gathering" at the end of the age. Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Hosea speak of a resurrection. This is a "restoration" in preparation for "the age to come." Jacob/Ephraim will be restored. Gentiles who believe in God, who renounce and

reject their idolatry, and who enter into covenant with him, are included in the restored House of Israel and share in all the promises, being counted as seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). Ezekiel further informs us that in the age to come, restored Israelites and believing gentiles will share together in the fulfillment of all the promised blessings of God (Ezekiel 47:21-23).

Malachi's words, "Have we not all one Father? Has not God created all of us?" (Malachi 2:10), ring true. Both Jews who believe in God and gentiles/Christians who believe in God belong to God's two families. That is the biblical picture presented by the prophets. *Torah* Judaism is based on the teachings of Moses and the prophets. Biblical Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus in the gospels (he also taught from Moses and the prophets) and the instruction of the apostles in the epistles of the New Testament.

To understand the prophetic aspects of the story of Joseph is to comprehend the teachings of the New Testament which have their basis in Moses and the Prophets.

All of God's promises to the patriarchs and to Israel and the predictions of the prophets will be fulfilled. Israel will be restored and God's people will live together as brothers. Therefore, in preparation for that day, Jews and Christians must learn to regard, respect and treat each other as brothers.

Rabbi M. Schimmel, spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Meier in Studio City, California, wrote the following prayer for "Brotherhood." It clearly expresses the sentiments of Moses and the prophets on what relations between believing Jews and believing gentile Christians should be:

"My Heavenly Father, I come to you in prayer with deep rejoicing and thanksgiving for your goodness to me. My heart is filled to overflowing with gratefulness as I think of the gifts that flow eternally from you. I rejoice and give thanks for the gift of your love, infinite, unchanging, eternal--enfolding me, drawing me ever closer to you. Father, I would open my heart even wider so that your love may flow through me to bless all whose lives I touch. There is a spirit in all men, not in one particular, not in one special group of men, but in all men. I realize no one is set apart, everyone is special and important to God, our Father. It is in this feeling of brotherhood that man finds inspiration. May your love and guidance lead my future. Amen."

SUMMARY

Attention is called to a teaching of the great prophet Moses. He summarized the Decalogue with two statements:

The first is: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). This statement encompasses the first four precepts of the Decalogue. The *Shema`* is a declaration of the identity of the one Creator God, and its frequent repetition in daily prayers serves as protection against idolatry. Our worship and service to God must spring from a heart motivated by love for him.

The second statement is: "... but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am *Yahweh* the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). This statement summarizes the last six precepts of the Decalogue and gives guidelines for how we should live together as human beings in a spirit of brotherhood. If a man does not love his brother, how can he say that he loves God? Our relationships with each other are based upon our relationship with God.

"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"
(Matthew 22:40)

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